



Outerbridge

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Cover: Carbro color print, 1938

Figure 6 on page 33 is from Steichen: A Life in Photography by Edward Steichen; used by permission of Doubleday & Co., Inc.

Paul Outerbridge, Jr.

The Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies

Robert Glenn Ketchum
Project Director

Essay and historical research by
Graham Howe

The Center

The Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies is a non-profit, California corporation whose purpose is to stimulate and encourage the appreciation of photography as a fine art and to disseminate information relative to its science and history through teaching, workshops, lecture programs, exhibitions, publications and films.

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The Center would also like to express its deepest appreciation to B.H. Goldberg, representative of the Paul Outerbridge collection, for his kind cooperation, and Mrs. Lois Outerbridge for her history book of stories and her ardent support.

Preface

Although the name Paul Outerbridge has appeared frequently throughout my encounters with photographic history, his work and his life have remained relatively obscure. Brief passages by historians and small portfolio reproductions of the same two or three prints never provided enough information about the man for one to know his work with any intimacy.

Less than three-hundred of his images are spread throughout institutional collections nationally, and the sparsity has made it difficult to view a body of work large enough to perceive the depth of his contribution to the art. More interesting to me than the published and better-known platinum prints were his carbro color photographs, none of which I had ever seen.

In 1942, Beaumont Newhall, then Curator of Photography for the Museum of Modern Art in New York, broke the "color barrier" and accepted three of Outerbridge's prints into the museum's collection, acknowledging them to be the first such material ever received. With this kind of prestigious accolade and his recognition as a pioneer in color research, it only became more curious that I knew and could find so little about him. Consequently, I looked forward to the opportunity of viewing several old trunks filled with prints that his widow, Lois, had stored in her basement. In the back of my mind I assumed what I would find would be work prints and seconds he never wanted to surface publicly, but I was sure even these would broaden my limited knowledge of his talent. I was hardly prepared for the five-hundred-fifty print estate supplemented by drawings, transparencies, diaries, and some of his original equipment. Nearly every platinum, bromide and silver print he had ever made was there, the best of each carefully mounted, signed, and dated.

More rewarding yet were the numerous mint-condition carbro color prints. Due to the laborious and expensive carbro process, Outerbridge seldom could afford to make more than one or two prints of each image. He then kept the originals and sold only their reproduction rights. Here in the trunks were not only a number of prints that were already in museum collections, but also the entire body of work resulting from his life-long study of the nude figure. He had been forced to keep almost all of these to himself because institutional and publication censors had found them objectionable. Much too shocking a reality for his audience then, these color images are now distinct predecessors of a contemporary fascination with the human body.

The diaries contained meticulous notes and among the papers were personal letters, business correspondence, articles written for publication, resumes and

the original manuscript for his book Photographing In Color.

In this vast consolidation of material I saw the chance to research and exhibit a collection that would inevitably be broken apart by the sale of individual pieces. Here existed an opportunity for the Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies to exercise its capabilities, involve itself, and contribute something of value to the national photographic community.

The two years this project has taken to complete have been important to the evolution of the Center and we have benefitted from the experiences provided by such a cooperative effort. I am personally indebted to my fellow members of the Board of Trustees for their continuous support; and all of us at the Center are grateful to the National Endowment for the Arts for their support and cooperation.

Robert Glenn Ketchum
Project Director

by Graham Howe

A Biographical Sketch

Paul Outerbridge, Jr. was born into a wealthy family in New York City, in 1896. His father, a renowned surgeon, came from an eminent old family in Bermuda, where he met his wife, a clergyman's daughter. A protective and dictatorial mother, she did not allow Paul to go to school until he was ten years old. After a brief period at an expensive preparatory school in New York City, he was sent off to the Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Recalling this experience, Paul wrote: "The life there proved quite difficult for me. I felt very lonely having been brought up as entirely too much of a mother's boy..."¹ He found, also, that the scholarly work was difficult. After several illnesses he returned to New York to attend the Cutler School. Happier with a less demanding curriculum, Paul began writing short stories and acting as the business manager for the school newspaper.

Turning from a university education, Paul joined classes in "Life Drawing and Anatomy" at the Art Students League in New York. He began to freelance his skills in illustration, designing a cover for *Judge* magazine, and later posters for the Wintergarden review. It was here that Paul met with Relle Peters, a theatrical stage designer whom he occasionally assisted in the designing and painting of production sets. Later, in 1916 while recuperating from an illness in Bermuda, he produced and designed a quasi-professional stage revue. Returning to New York, he socialized with literary, theatrical and visual arts figures and made many valuable liaisons. However, his father was not pleased with Paul's aspiration to the arts and persuaded him to work for a Wall Street brokerage firm, a job which lasted for about three months. Maintaining his interest in the arts, Paul soon took a share in a Greenwich Village studio just off Washington Square. "This studio, from my friends' points of view, was the scene of some wild chorus girl parties and a lot of drinking, and from my point of view, of some very large

soirees at which were present some of the most famous people of the stage, arts, literary world, and playwrights."²

By mid-1917, the United States entered World War I which caused Outerbridge to join the Royal Flying Corps. After training in Canada and Texas, his career flying "Jennies" came to an end after a minor crash landing during an exercise. Paul decided that he would probably be more useful to his country in an administrative capacity, and so he joined the army. His job was to assist reporting on lumber camp operations which necessitated making photographic documentation. This was his initial introduction to the camera. After some fifteen months in service, the War ended and Paul, now twenty-two years old, decided to travel. During the Christmas of 1918, he worked in a San Francisco jewelry store and soon after went to Hollywood to break into motion pictures. However, his funds were dissipated before this ideal ever came to fruition, and he was forced to return to Greenwich Village.

Outerbridge, a most fastidious man, began to make a habit of recording details of his daily life in a pocket notebook. He would describe breakfast and its cost, his appointments for the day, the names of casual acquaintances encountered, notes on interesting conversations, dinner details, a brief critique of the evening's entertainment, a weather report for the day, and finally the time he retired. These notes were transferred to a larger set of leather bound diaries, which were burned by Outerbridge, a few months before his death in 1958. A few notebooks did, however, survive, and remain a testament to this man's meticulous examination and extraordinary recording of everything he did.

During one of Paul's frequent trips to Bermuda, where his uncle and other relatives maintained industrial and governmental interests, he met Paula. She attracted a considerable amount of his attention, coinciding with his growing preoccupation and appreciation of "feminine beauty".³ They were married eighteen months later, in the summer of 1921, and honeymooned at the Ritz in Atlantic City.

Paula's annual allowance of \$1,800 made life comfortable for the couple, who, upon returning to New York, decided to live on the top floor of his parents' home at 27 West 74th Street. Paul continued to socialize with his friends in the arts, and soon took an amateur interest in photography. In a few months he was drawn seriously into this medium, and by October had entered the Clarence H. White School of Photography at 460 West 144th Street. "I worked very hard at my photography, feeling for the first time I had a real incentive in life, and made rapid progress."⁴ He would make several exposures daily noting the exact subject and composition, his equipment, materials and processes. Despite the scarcity of platinum, Outerbridge insisted upon using this paper for his printing to obtain optimum tonal quality from his negatives. Most of the photographs were made in his studio, a room in the family house, where he would contrive elegantly simple still lifes of abstract form. Eggs in a bowl, a milk bottle, an electric light bulb, a wooden box, or a saw would be arranged in a harmonious design, lit and composed with a 4 x 5 inch camera. Once or twice each week he would arrange for a nude model to sit for him. Occasionally he would make photographs of the city. It was common for Outerbridge to work late into the evening processing and printing the work he had made during the day. If the desired effect was not obtained, he would try again the following morning.



Outerbridge in New York
c. 1921

Within nine months of this intense activity his photograph of a milk bottle and some eggs was reproduced full page in Vanity Fair magazine, "Suggesting How the Modern Conception of Abstract Design May Be Applied To Still Life Photography".⁵ Although Outerbridge did not complete more than half the required classes at the White School, he was, nevertheless, asked to take over the class in composition and aesthetics, replacing for a short time his own teacher, Professor Martin of the Department of Fine Arts, Teachers College, Columbia University of New York. Recalling his colleagues at the White School many years later, Paul Outerbridge wrote, "Margaret Watkins made some excellent pattern shots, Ralph Steiner in abstract film, Robert Waida a Japanese (photographer), Ira (Wright) Martin a photo curator at the Frick Museum, Stella Simon, who made a film of nothing but hands, Anton Bruehl who worked with Bourges in Vogue and Vanity Fair".⁶ Other students at the White School during this time were Margaret Bourke-White, Doris Ullmann, Laura Gilpin and Max Weber.

In February 1922, Paul Outerbridge was in the audience of an Alfred Stieglitz lecture given at the Art Center in New York, but it was not until early in 1924, when he had amassed a considerable body of work, that he visited and talked with Stieglitz at length. At the same time, Outerbridge began sculpture studies with Alexander Archipenko, who, in return for photographs of his sculptures, allowed him to work in his studio. Like most studies Outerbridge undertook, this, too, was brief. However, with his frequent visits to art galleries, museums, libraries, the theater, opera and cinema, Paul Outerbridge was certainly well-informed.

By 1924, Outerbridge was working with 4 x 5, 5 x 7 and 8 x 10 cameras and usually contact printing onto platinum paper which he mounted centrally on a debossed cream board, 11 x 14 inches. This was standard presentation to his clients, who at that time were mostly magazines, such as Vanity Fair, Arts and Decoration and Harper's Bazaar, or companies such as Pyrex and the Ide Company, manufacturers of men's shirts and collars. Perhaps one of the most distinguished early Paul Outerbridge photographs was made for this company: the Ide Collar (p. 16) white and starched was placed onto a checkerboard showing an abstract alternation of black and white, broken by the circular form of the collar. This image was published in the July 1922 issue of Vanity Fair, and when seen by Marcel Duchamp, was torn from the magazine and attached to the wall of his studio.⁷

Paul and his wife entertained the idea of overseas travel and apparently at relatively short notice decided to sail for Europe, which they did in February 1925. Arriving in London was a stimulating experience for Paul, his pocket notebook being barely large enough to contain all the details of his sightseeing. At three lines per quarter inch Outerbridge continued to cram information, recording his visit to The Royal Photographic Society where he met with J. Dudley Johnston. Impressed with his work, the Royal Photographic Society extended to Outerbridge an honorary membership to the Society for his time in England. They also requested the honor of a one-man exhibition, an offer which he regretfully refused because he needed his photographs in Paris. Paul saw the sights of Paris, and met many artists. Outerbridge would often visit Man Ray's studio and the two men would spend hours talking and exchanging ideas. A common entry in his diary would read, "spent all afternoon looking at Man Ray's abstract prints, portraits, nudes (only a few), his paintings and great



Outerbridge in Europe
c. 1926

enlargements...looked at his darkroom and discussed all his equipment and had a general photographic talk...went out at 8 p.m. next door to the top floor room at his hotel. I waited in his room decorated by Ki Ki (whose native paintings I had seen, and with whom Man Ray lives) ...tried to go to a Russian place for dinner but no room at all, place packed and rather good violins playing..."⁸

Sometimes Outerbridge would arrive at Man Ray's studio and find him unavailable. He would spend the afternoon talking to Berenice Abbott who, at that time, was Man Ray's assistant. In the spring of 1925 Man Ray introduced Paul Outerbridge to his friend Marcel Duchamp, and they talked at great length about art, ideals, making money out of art and Stieglitz.⁹ In Paris, Outerbridge also met Brancusi, Hoyningen-Huene, Picasso, Stravinsky, Picabia, De Mayer, Ganna Waecka, De Beaumont and Bocher.¹⁰ In May 1925, Outerbridge began working for Paris Vogue making photographs of fashion accessories. Often he would discuss his work with Edward Steichen, also on the staff at the time. After nearly three months at Vogue, Outerbridge, who appeared to be doing very well, left to freelance on his own.

In 1927, Outerbridge and Mason Seigal, a manufacturer of wax dummies, combined their capital in the creation of a very large and sophisticated commercial photography studio. Advertised as the largest and most technically advanced studio in Paris, if not the world, its opening was long awaited. "Finally, at the widely broadcast date, Outerbridge arrived in the studio, and the sitting began. Bridges moved, assistants rushed about the place, lights flashed. The great work of art was born; a few breathless minutes passed and Outerbridge brought out of his world's greatest darkroom and presented to the adoring audience the picture of an egg!"¹¹ This photograph was, no doubt, one highlight of some four thousand photographs Outerbridge claims to have made while exploring eggs. After less than a year the studio folded, but only after Outerbridge had made a number of photographs of wax dummies dressed as mannequins. Paul had lost a lot of money in the project and decided it was time to move. By this time, his marriage to Paula was failing, they separated and finally divorced. Outerbridge went to Berlin to try his hand in cinema, studying with the German film director, Pabst. After a short while he returned to London to become a set advisor for the film Variety, directed by E.A. Dupont. "Many of the camera angles in Variety paralleled the approach Outerbridge had already experimented with in his still photography."¹²

Back in New York in 1929, Outerbridge decided to undertake the challenge of color photography. For many months he experimented with the complex carbro color print process, and finally brought it to perfection. "Many of these pictures were made under considerable technical difficulties unknown to the present-day users of the newer, much easier color materials. Each composition cost a minimum of \$150 taking many man hours to produce. Three separate exposures of different duration, through three different color filters were required. Subsequently, three separate color images 1/10,000th of an inch thick had to be transferred IN REGISTER, one over another onto the paper you see..."¹³ For many years, photographers in America were to marvel at the Outerbridge carbro prints. "In color, as he had been in black and white, he became the acme and enigma – a 'photographer's photographer'. There are three things about his color photography that places it in its unique position: technically his carbros are gems. Their color range, their flesh tones, their



c. 1923

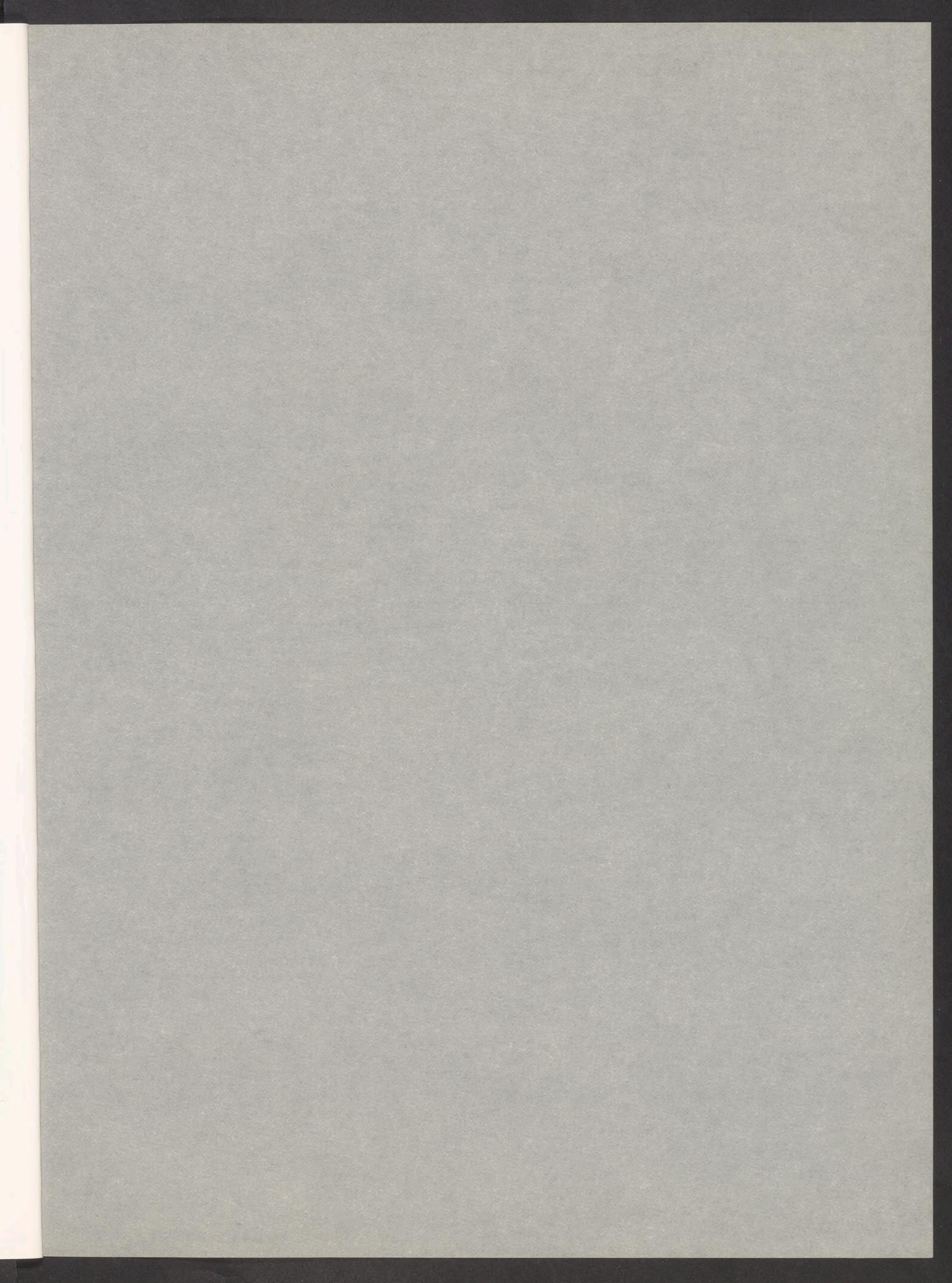
unbelievable fidelity make them the envy of all who see them."¹⁴

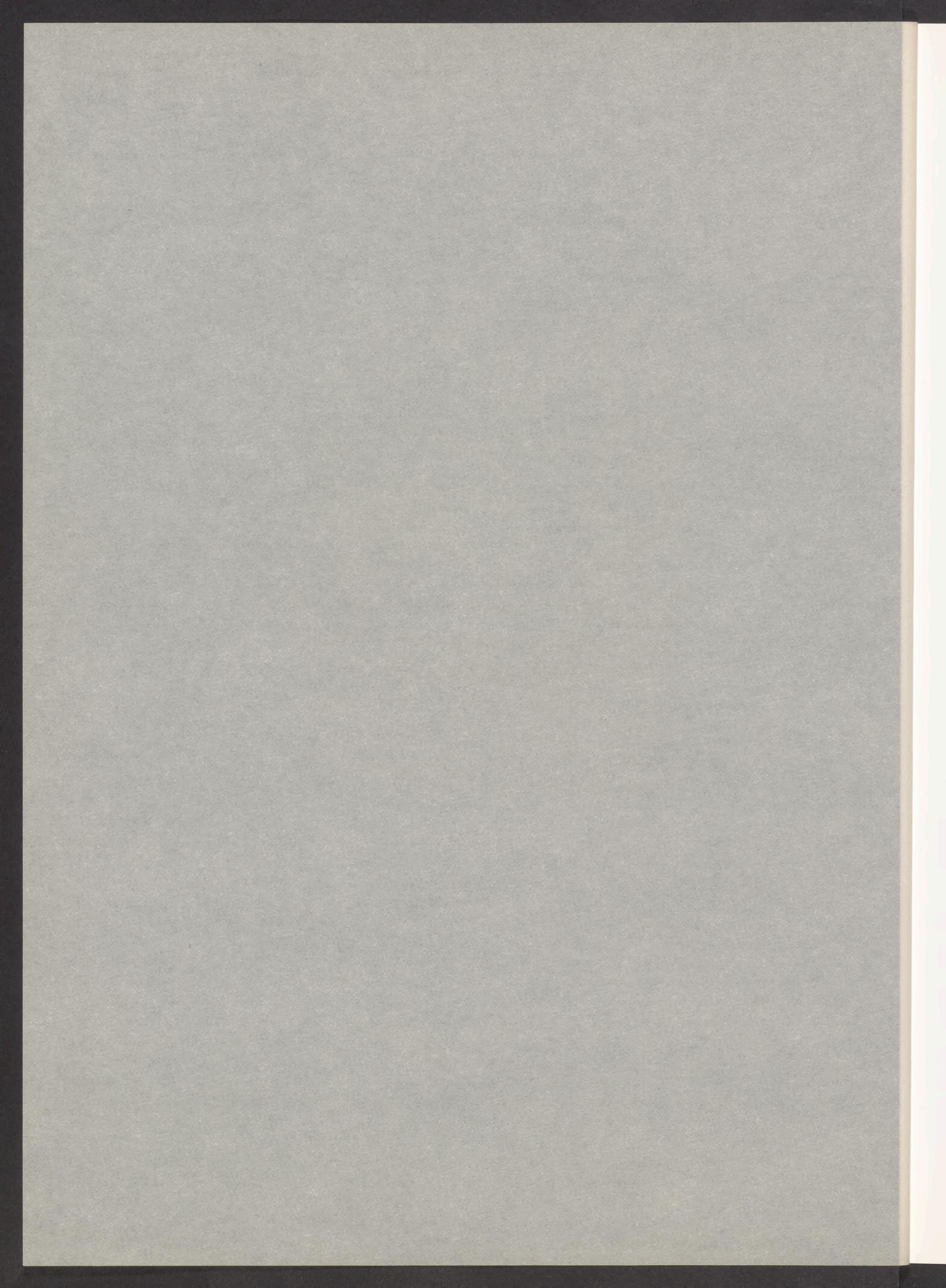
Early in the thirties, Outerbridge moved from New York City to his country home at Monsey, New York. After a few years of working in the country, he began to acquire the reputation of an ascetic in retreat. "Outerbridge is acutely sensitive, with a psychogenic dislike for the senseless struggle and competition of everyday life...He looks and moves like a maharajah, taking it for granted that the world will move slowly and leisurely past his dias. Screened behind an opaque moustache, he talks softly, dreamily, aimlessly, enthusiastically, about anything and everything that comes into his mind...He lives in a broken down frame house in the country – a place he describes with the same tone he would use for the House of Usher. Although each time you see him, you expect him to announce that the house has fallen, the place is resplendent with ultra-high amperage lighting equipment, modernistic furniture, precision laboratories, pedigreed dogs, and a seven foot snake. He does his own cooking, and dines richly. He dries his prints over the kitchen stove while his guests and suave models wash dishes. He does all of this in the grand manner."¹⁵

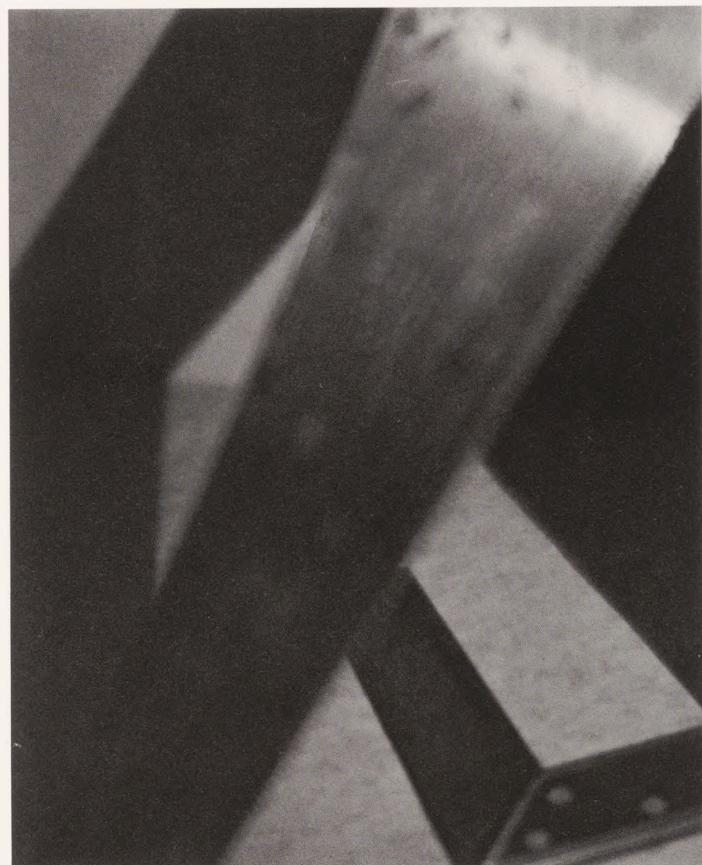
During his retreat at Monsey, Outerbridge began meticulous research on color photography and compiled his findings. Photographing in Color, published in the spring of 1940 by Random House, was immediately embraced by the public and the critics. It sold out its first five thousand copies in a few months. The book received praising reviews, commenting upon its clarity, its elegant design, its superb color plates, simplicity, and meticulous attention to detail.

Outerbridge had been in photography for eighteen years working primarily as a fine artist. Although he catered to a market, he didn't compromise his aesthetic standards. He found this difficult: "looking back over the years, I feel that photography is a pretty tough game for anyone who wishes to practice it as a fine art. The monetary compensations afforded are vastly inferior to those of many other fields, but I suppose such was always more or less true of art. I still believe what I wrote in The Studio, and, with the increasing advances in color, that photography holds more possibilities for fine achievement than ever before. There is no reason why Reubens and Rembrandts cannot be done if men appear with their vision. Of course the commercialism and industrialism of this age do not lend themselves as readily to this sort of thing as have the conditions of other ages. But art will always go on."¹⁶

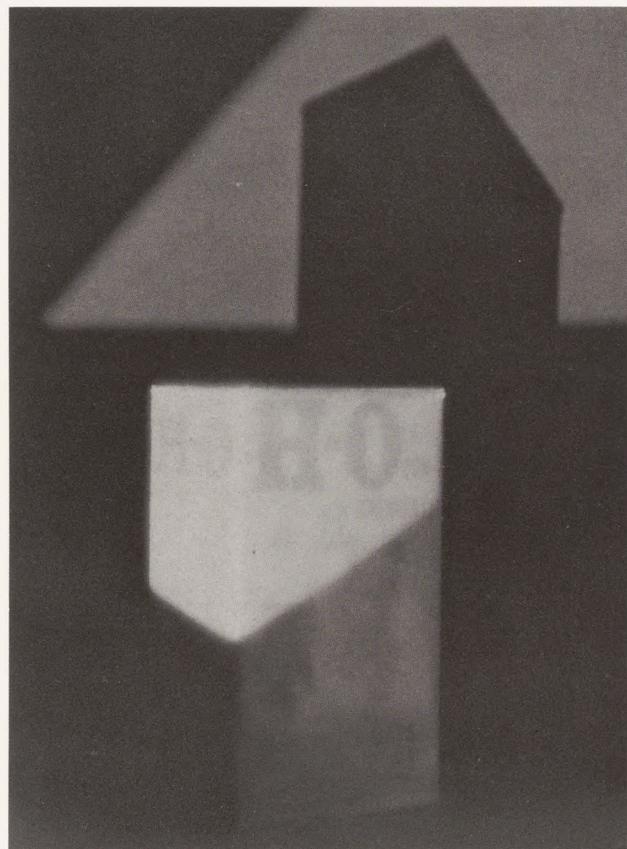
In 1937, Life magazine was being rehearsed in dummies which were printed and circulated to prospective advertisers. One of these contained five Outerbridge color photographs as examples of "The beauty and art that could be encompassed with camera and color."¹⁷ Tom Maloney, editor of U.S. Camera, recalls this event in 1960: "Paradoxical as it may seem at this moment, there was a reluctance on the part of Henry Luce and his co-workers to pay Outerbridge for the reproduction rights. They contended that they could get anything done by any immortal (whose work was) hanging at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and reproduce it at no cost..."¹⁸ When it was made clear to Luce and company that reproduction of great art only enhanced its value, Outerbridge was properly paid for the use of his material.



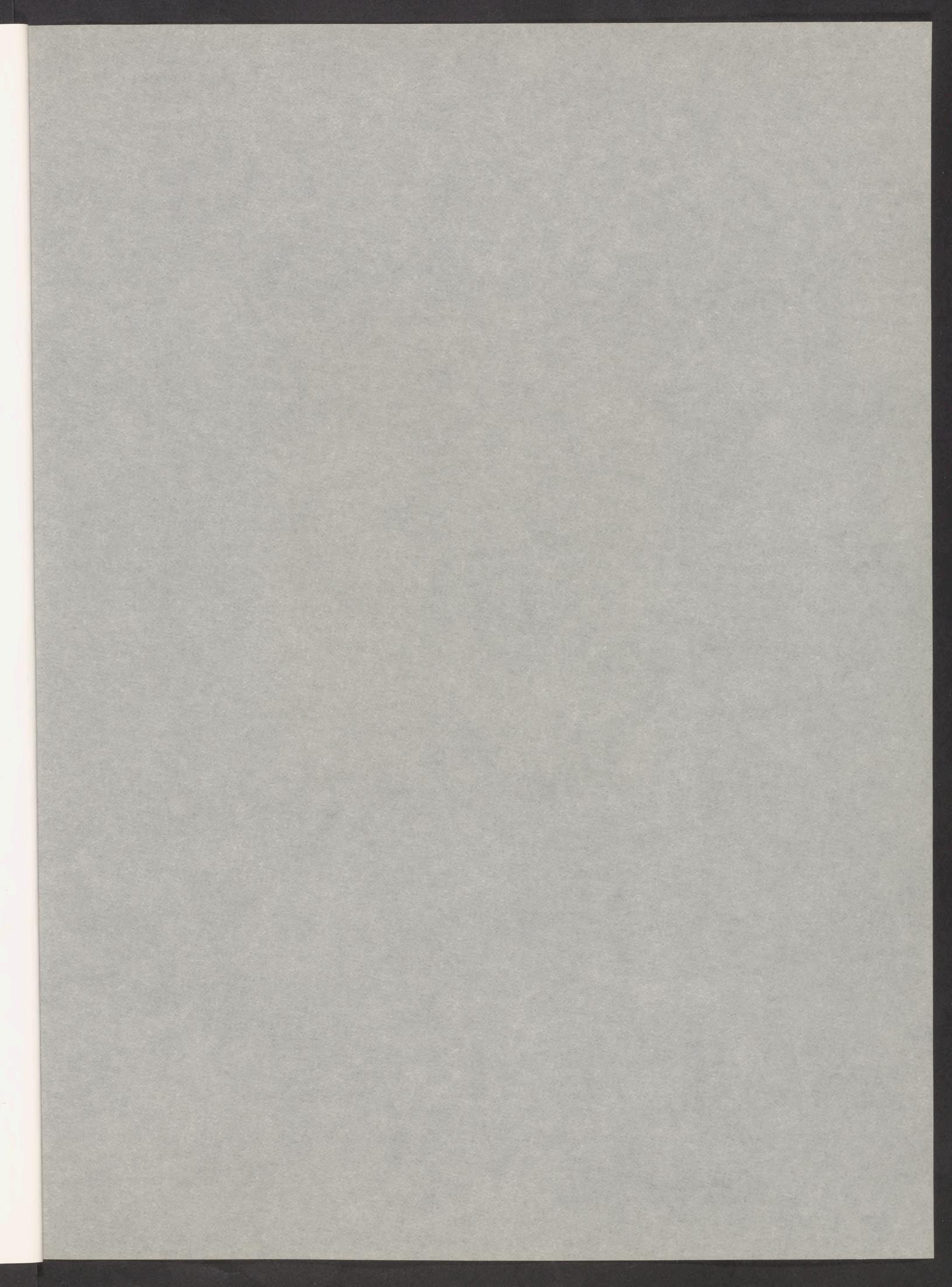


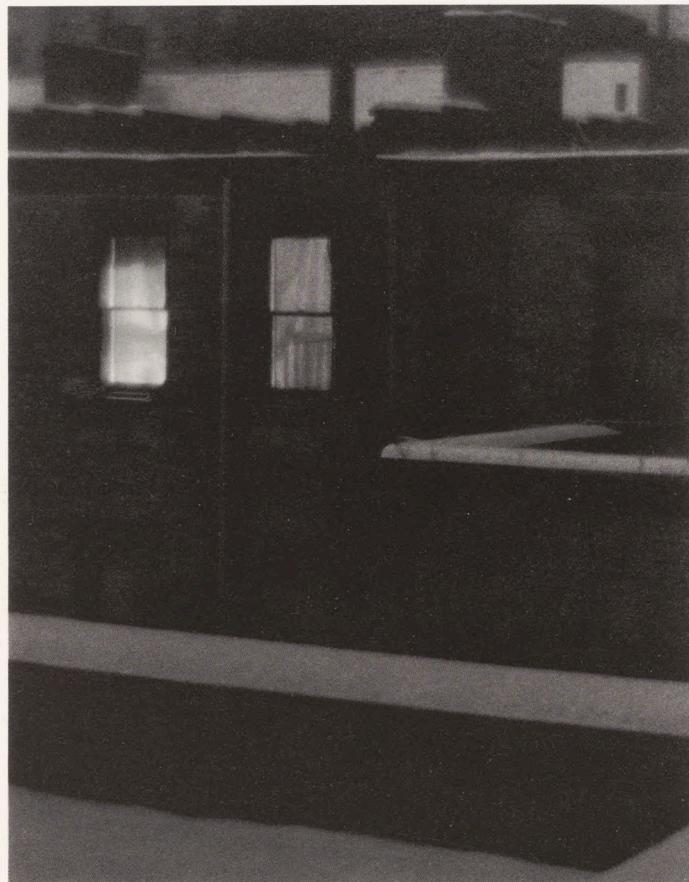


Saw and Square 1921

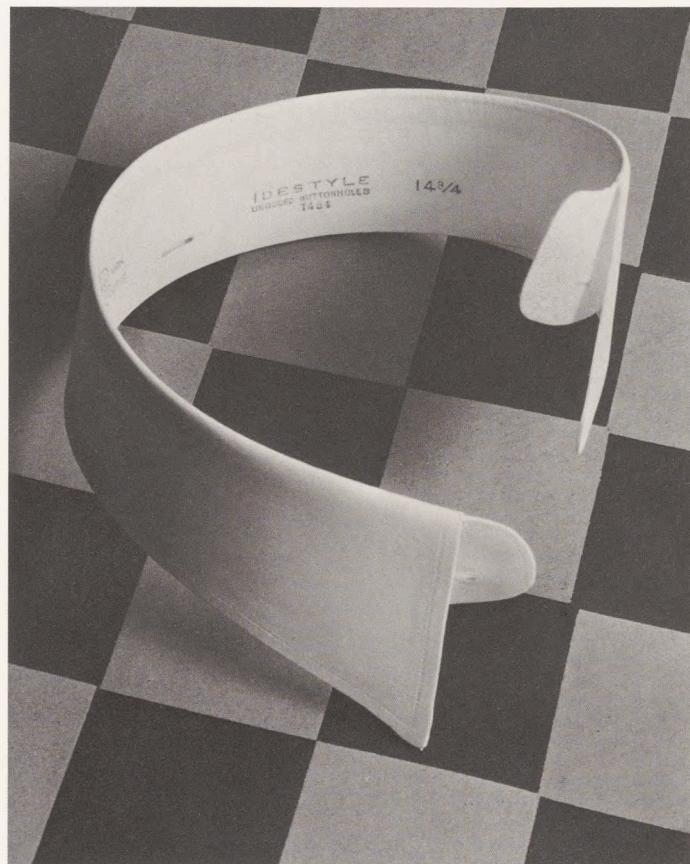


H.O. Box 1922

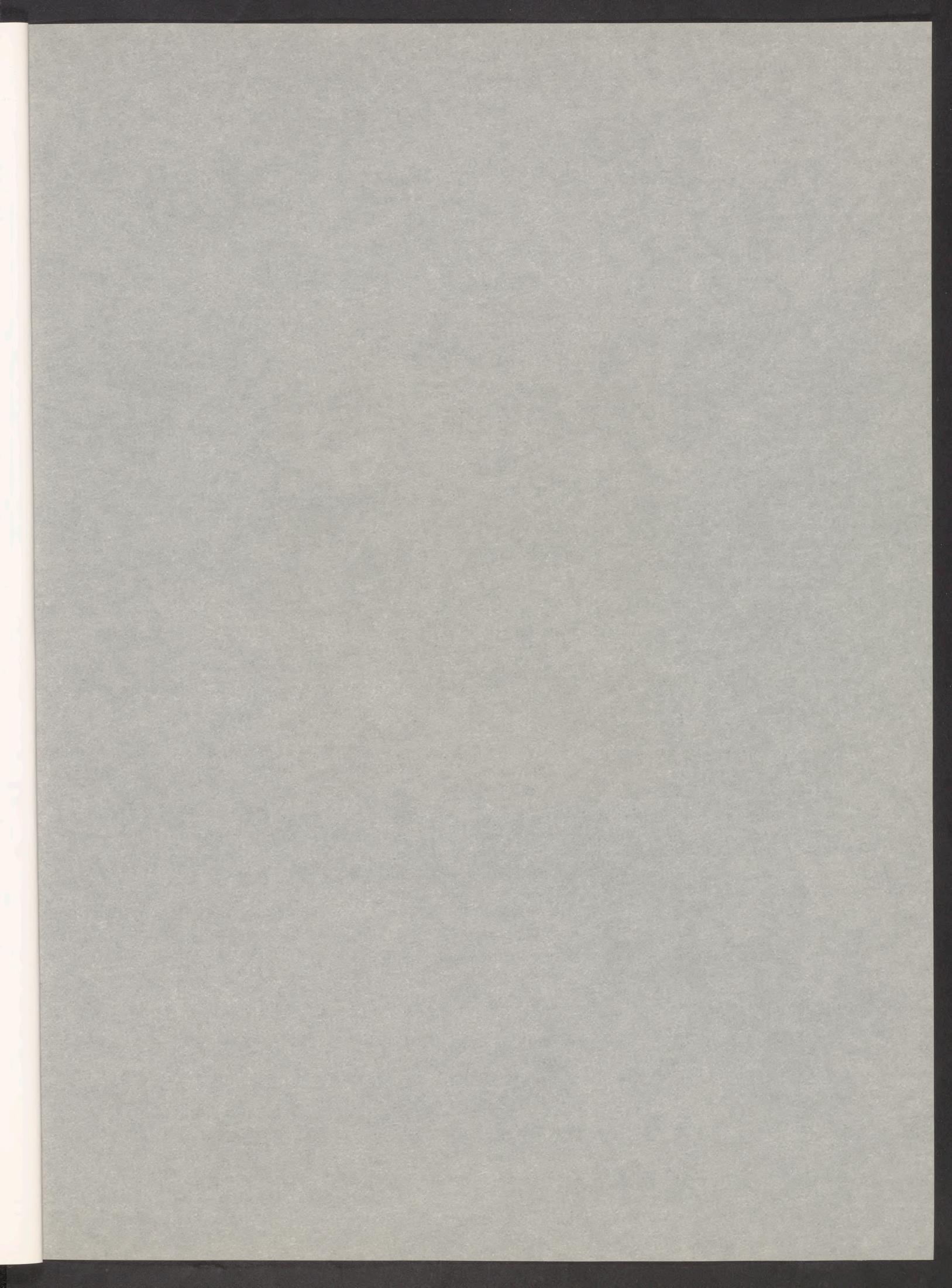


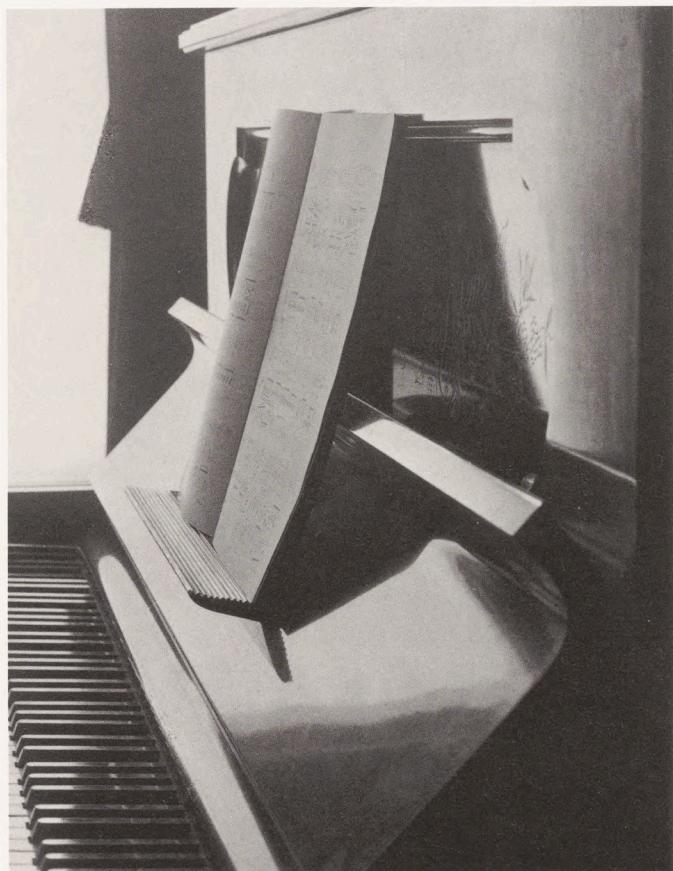


New York c.1923

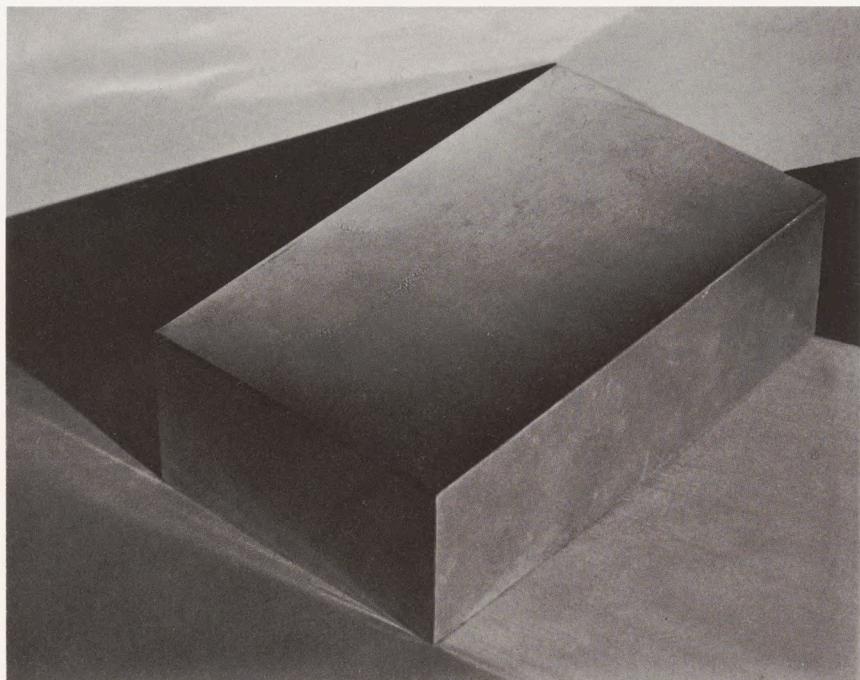


Ide Collar 1922

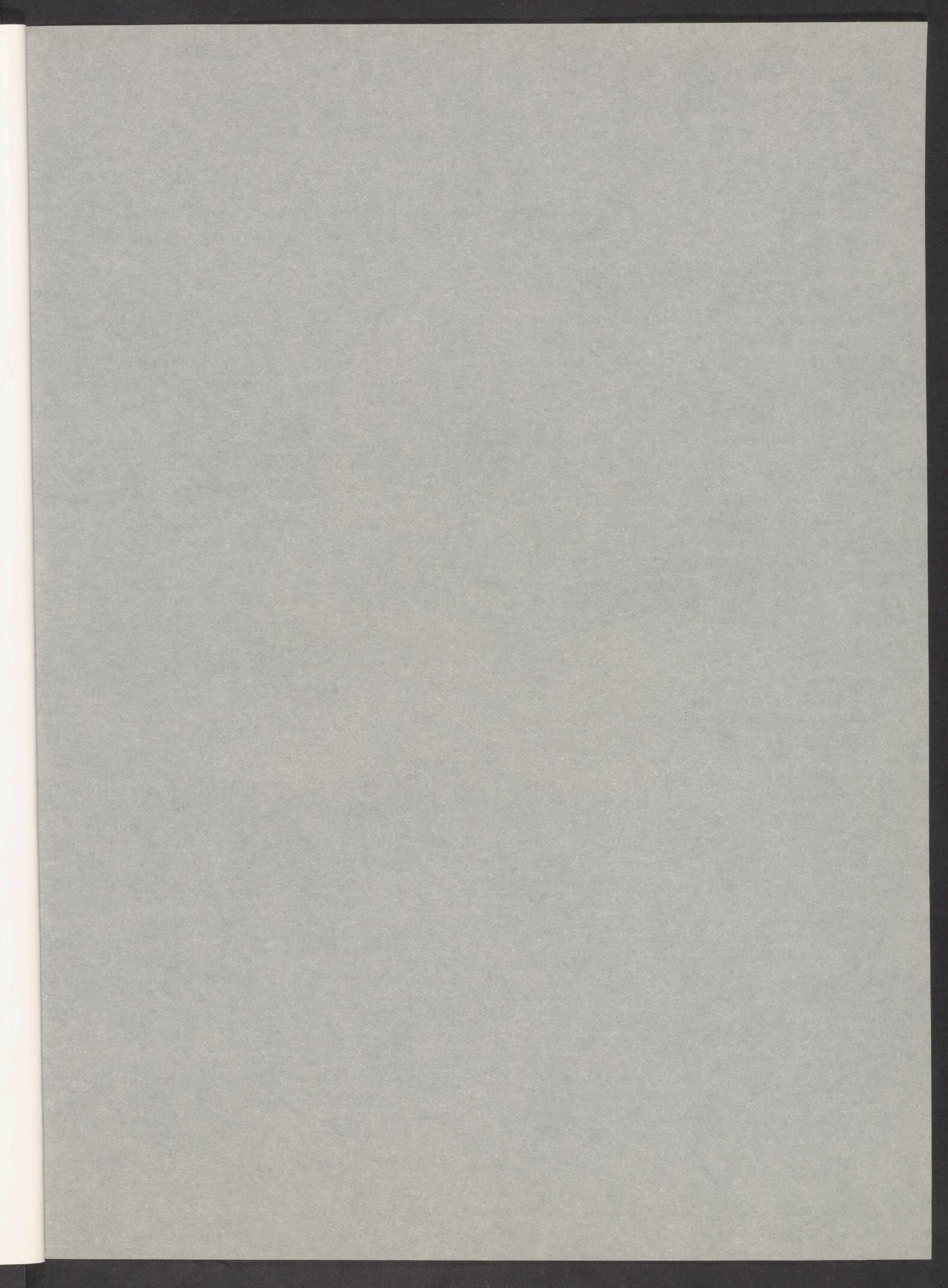


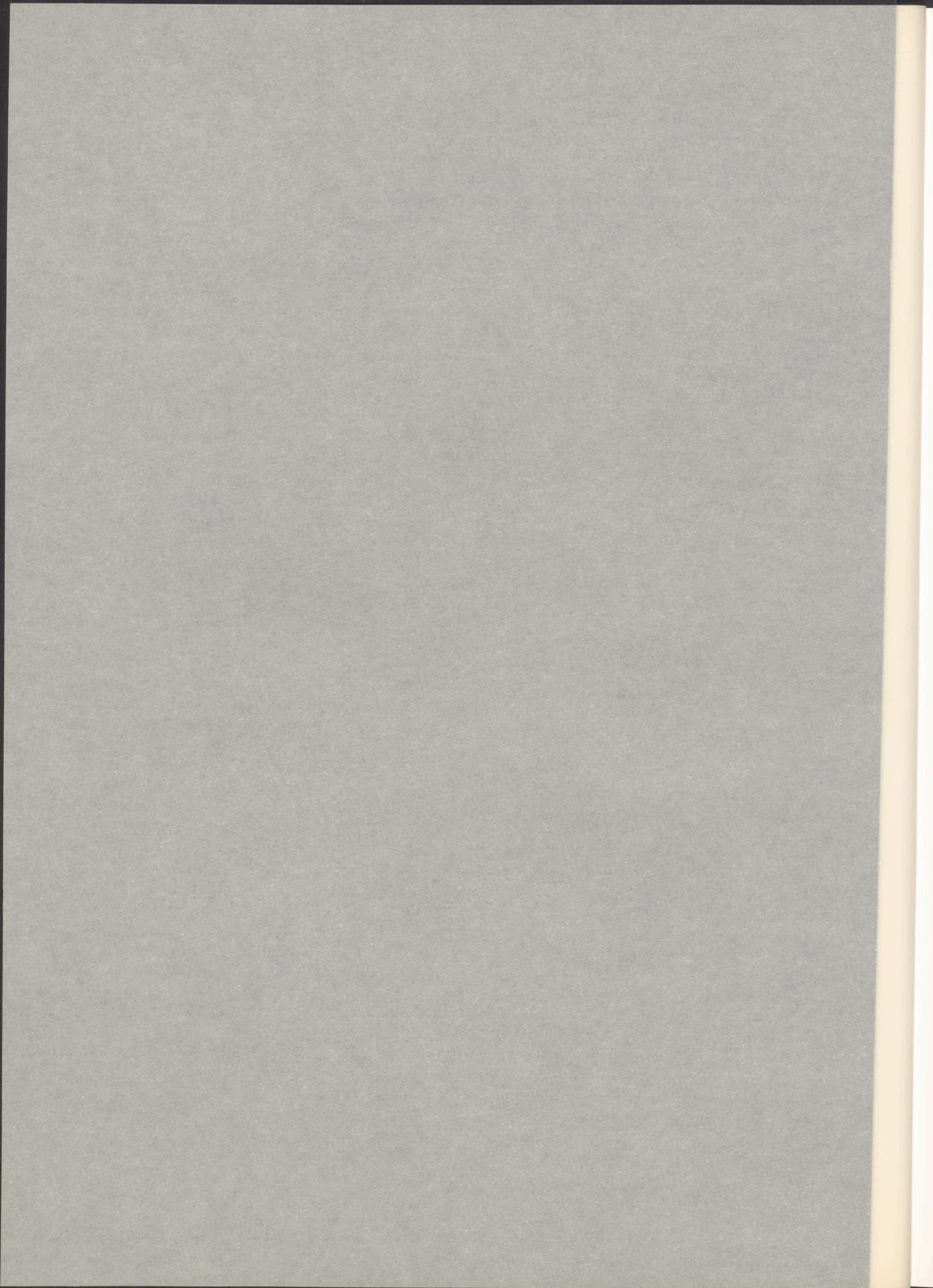


Piano 1924



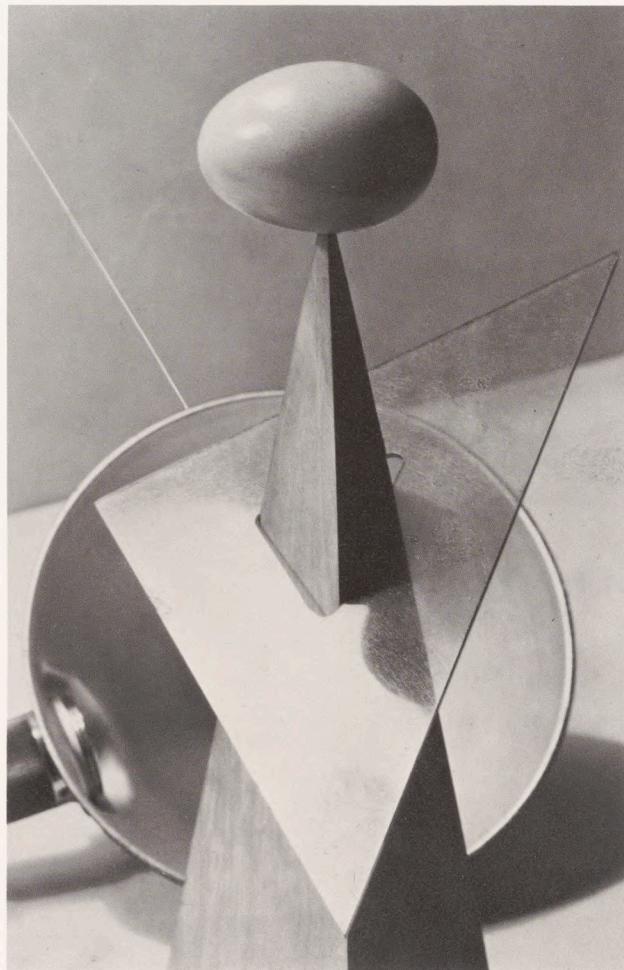
Saltine Box 1922



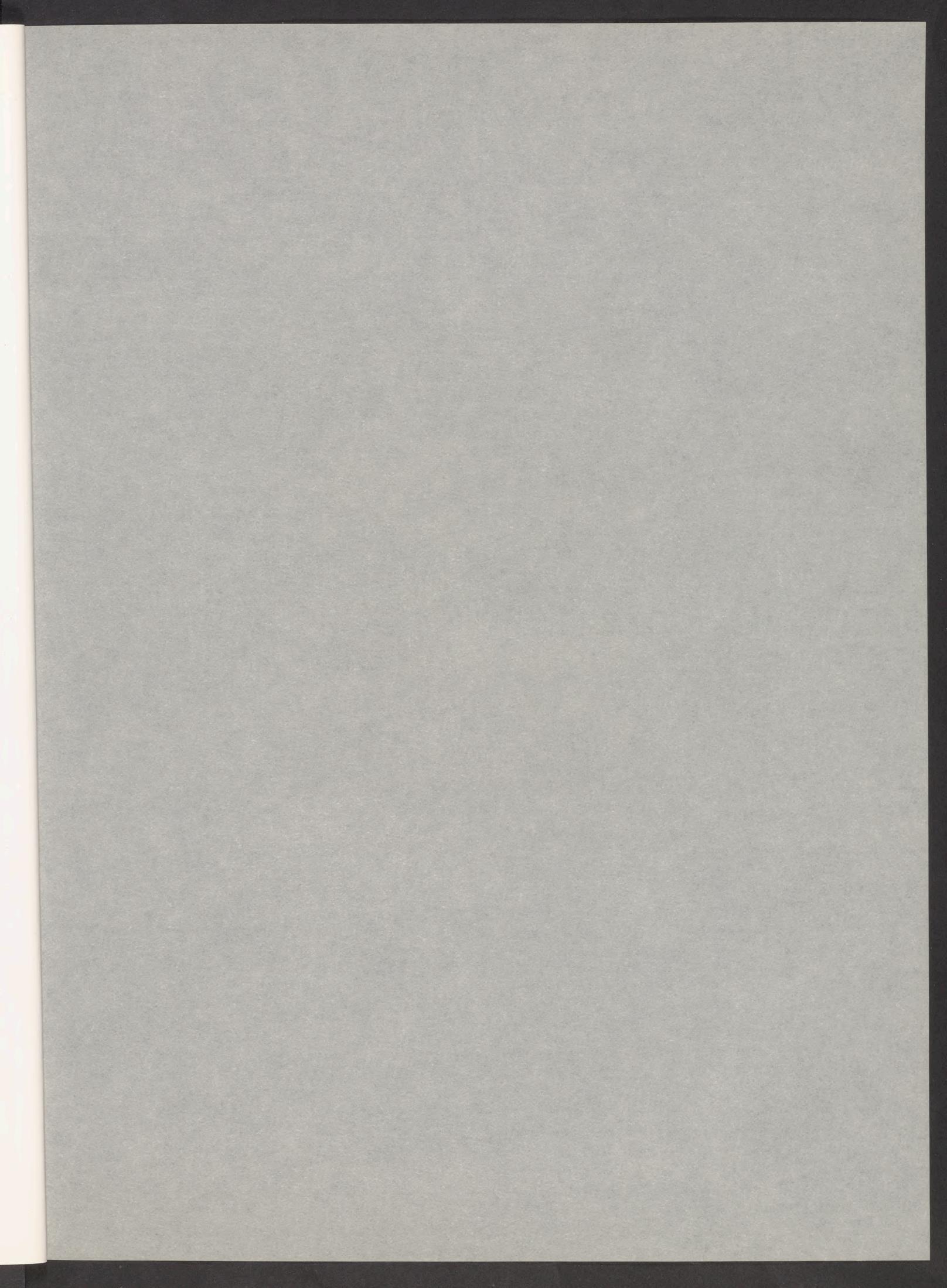


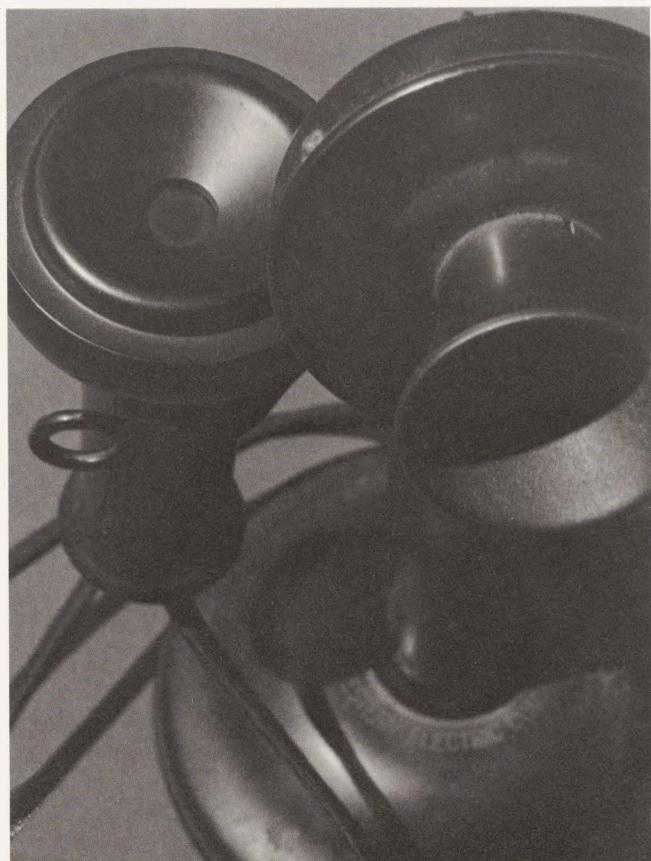


Rings 1924



The Triumph of the Egg 1932

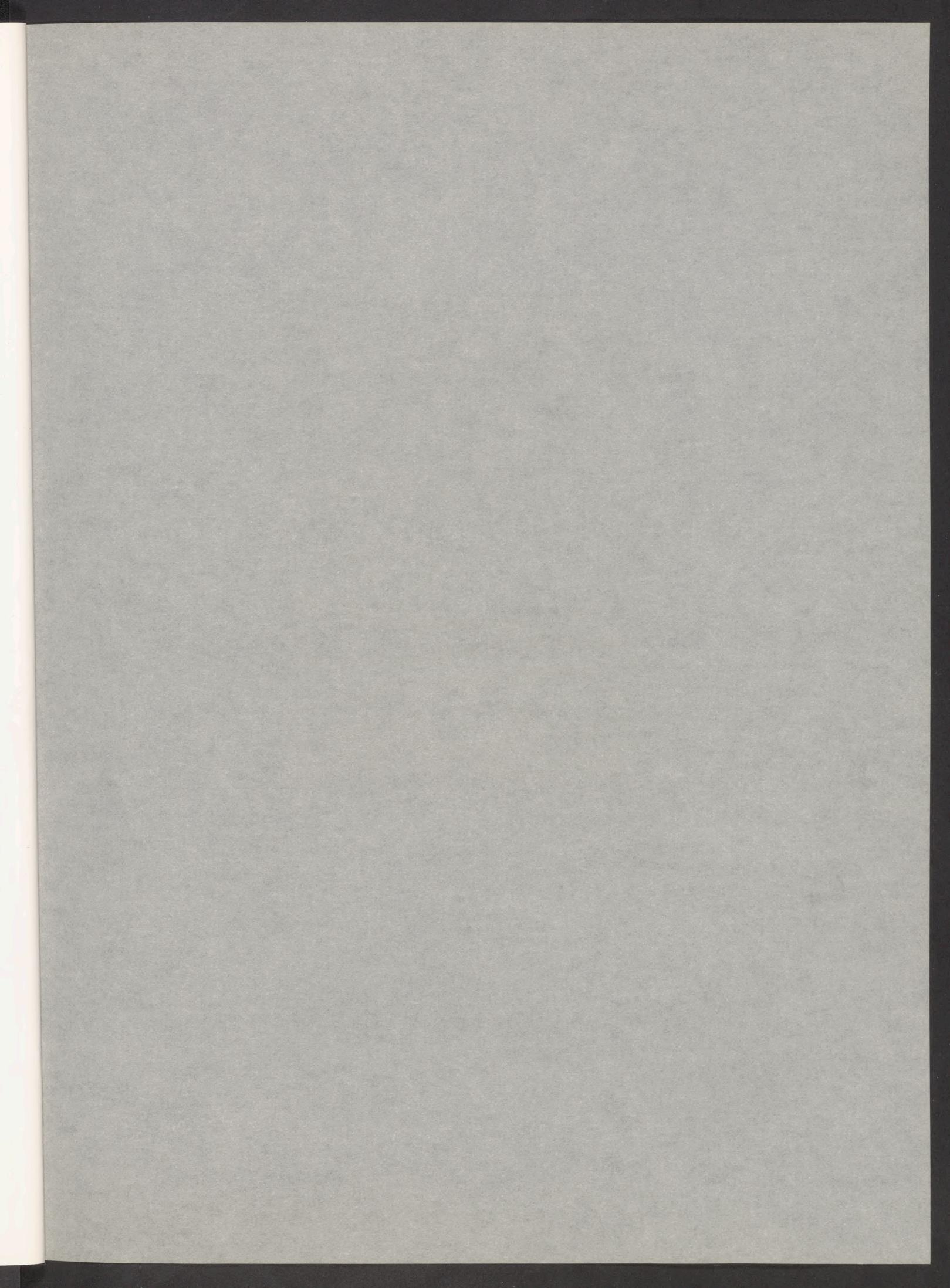


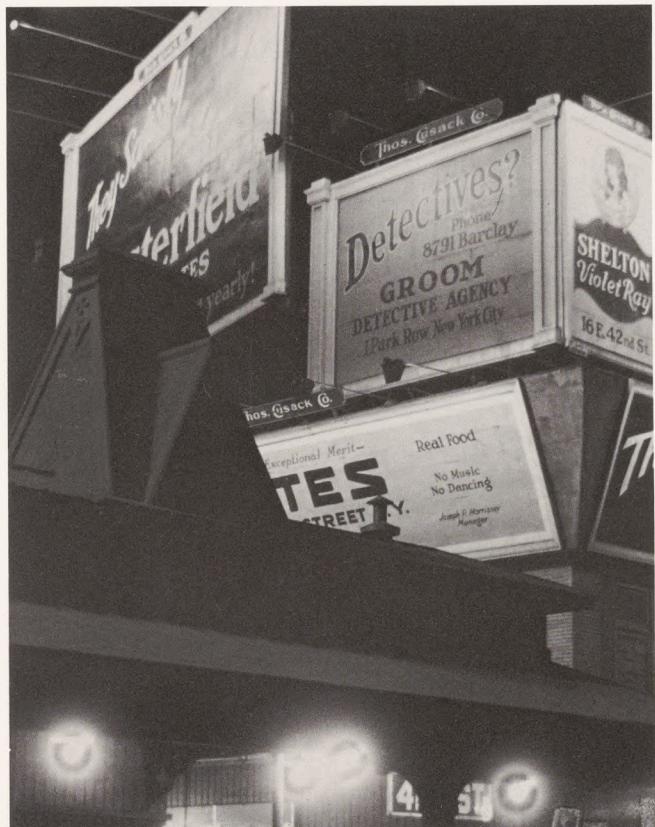


Telephone 1922

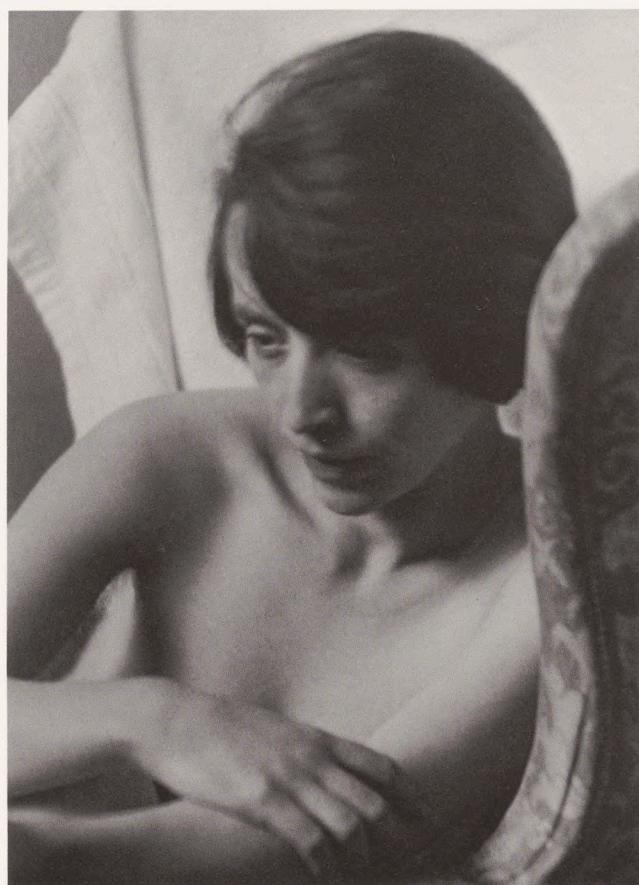


Hudson River Railroad Bridge c.1922

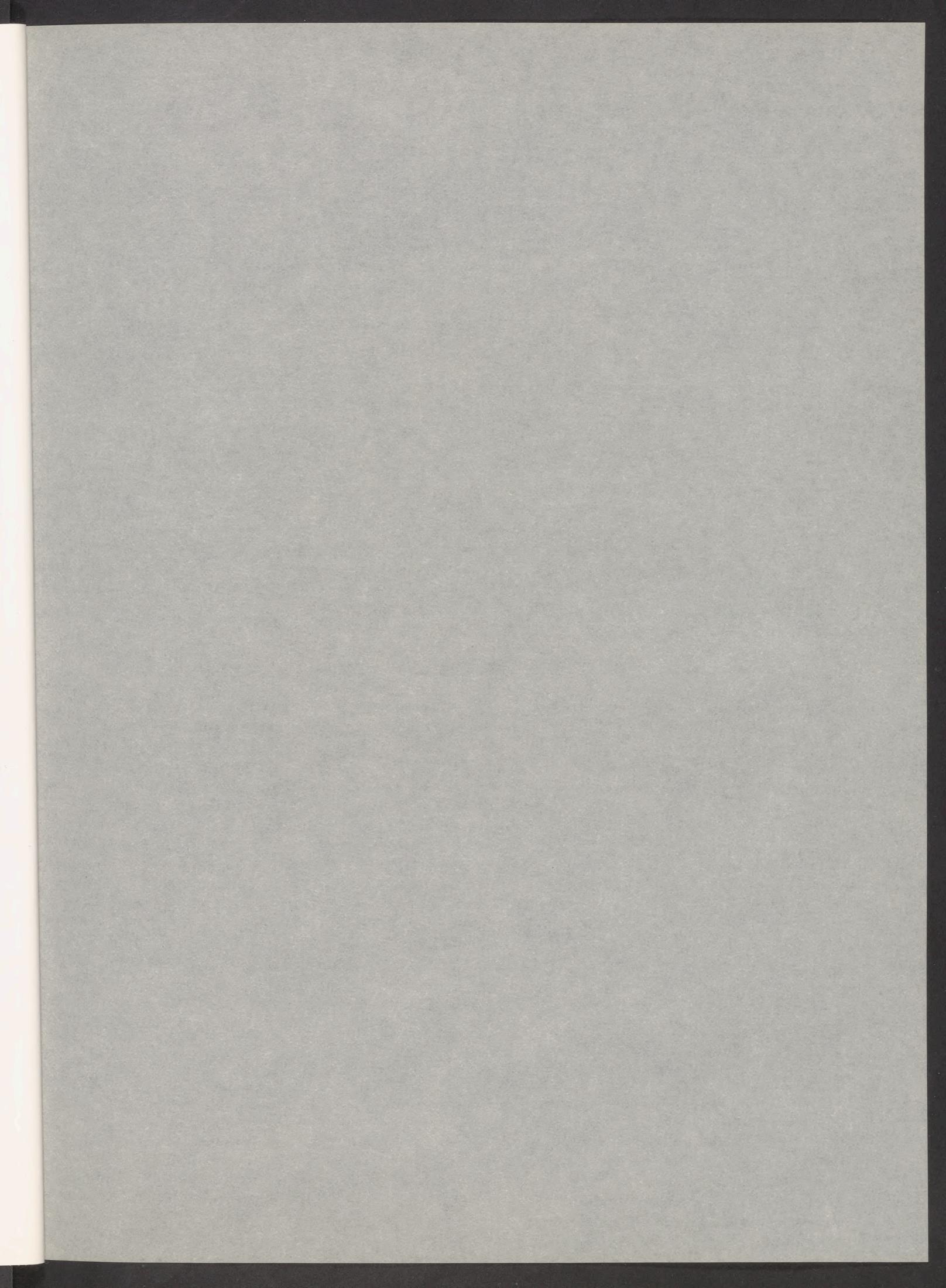


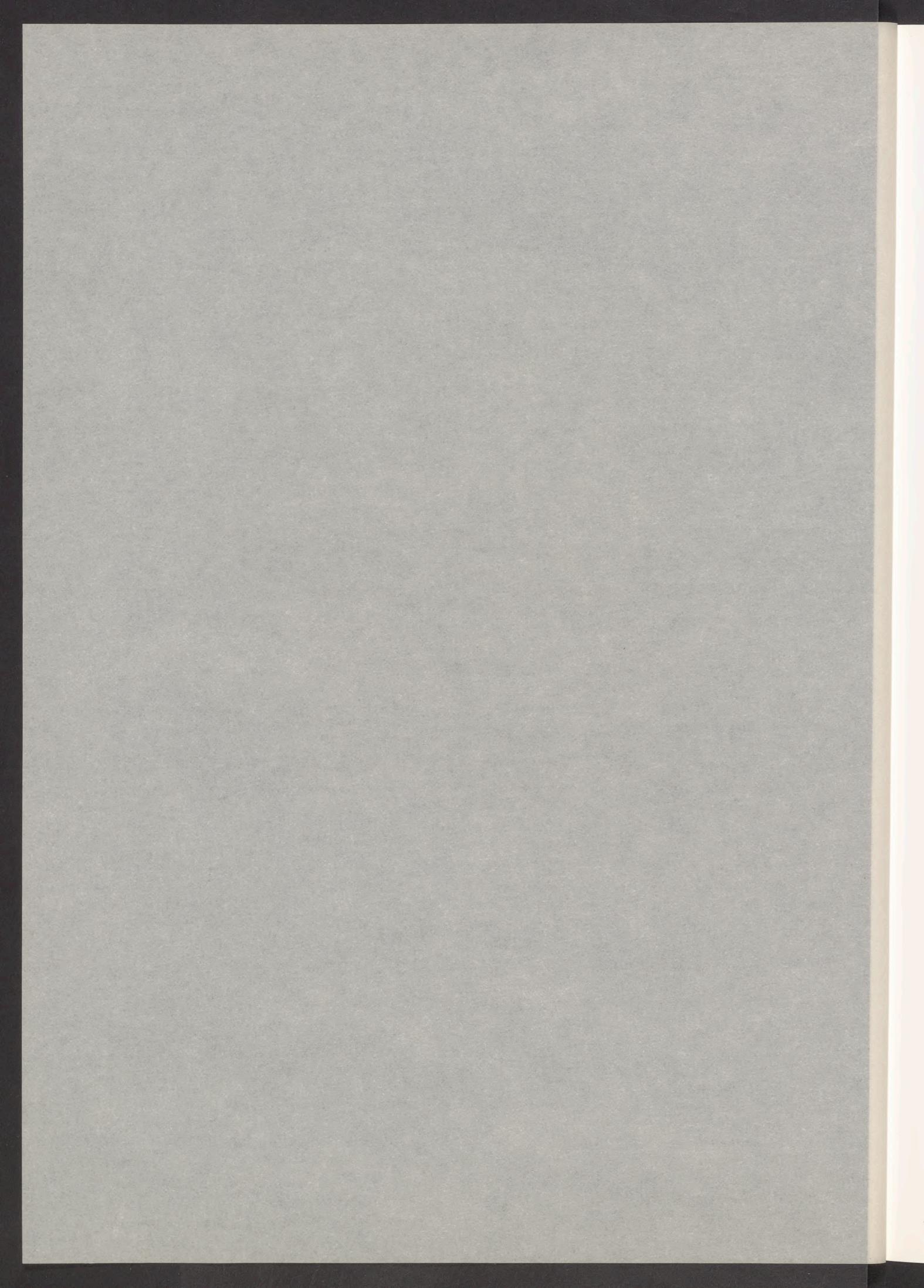


42nd Street Elevated Platform 1923



Nude in Chair c.1923



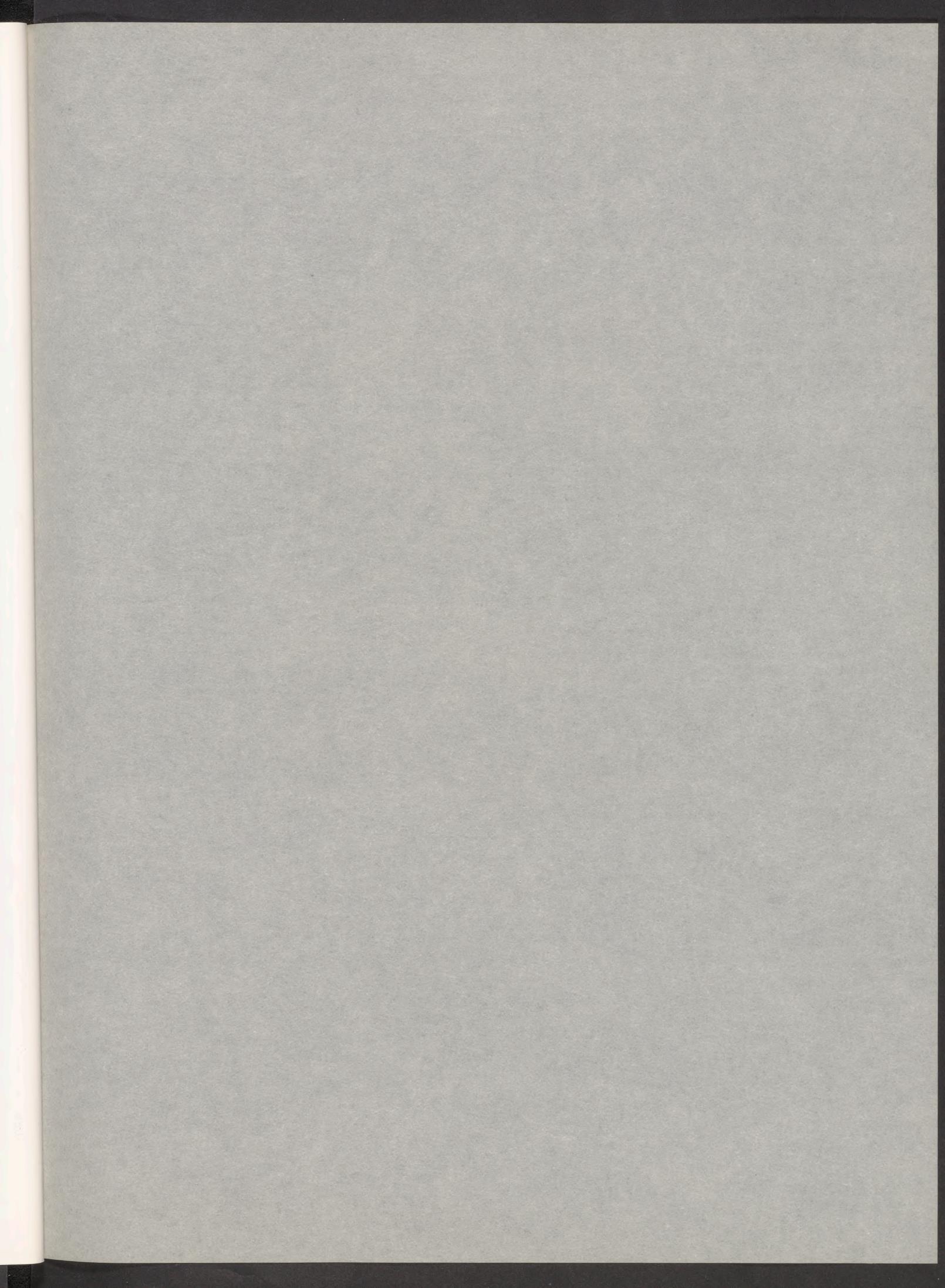


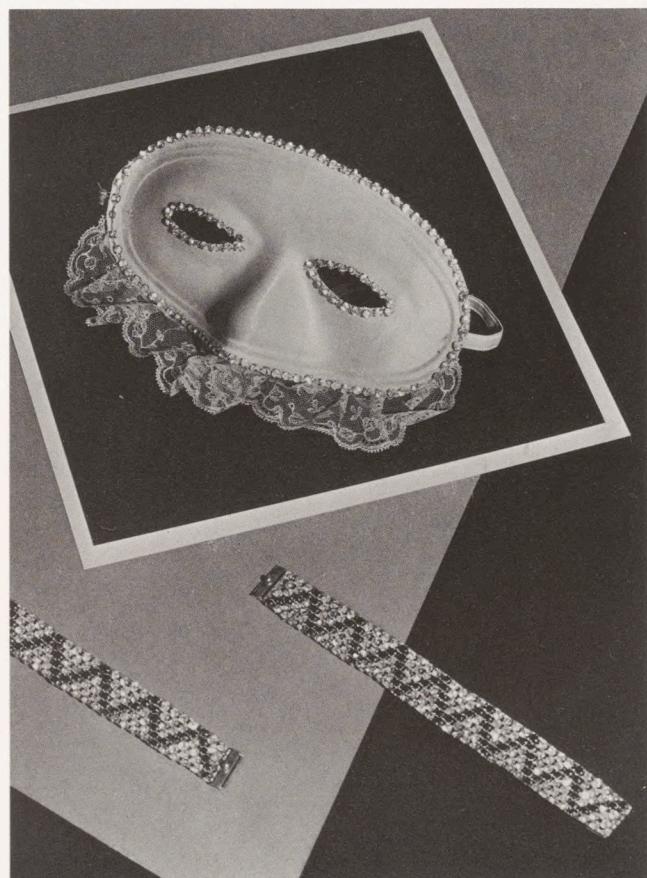


Nude on Sofa c.1923

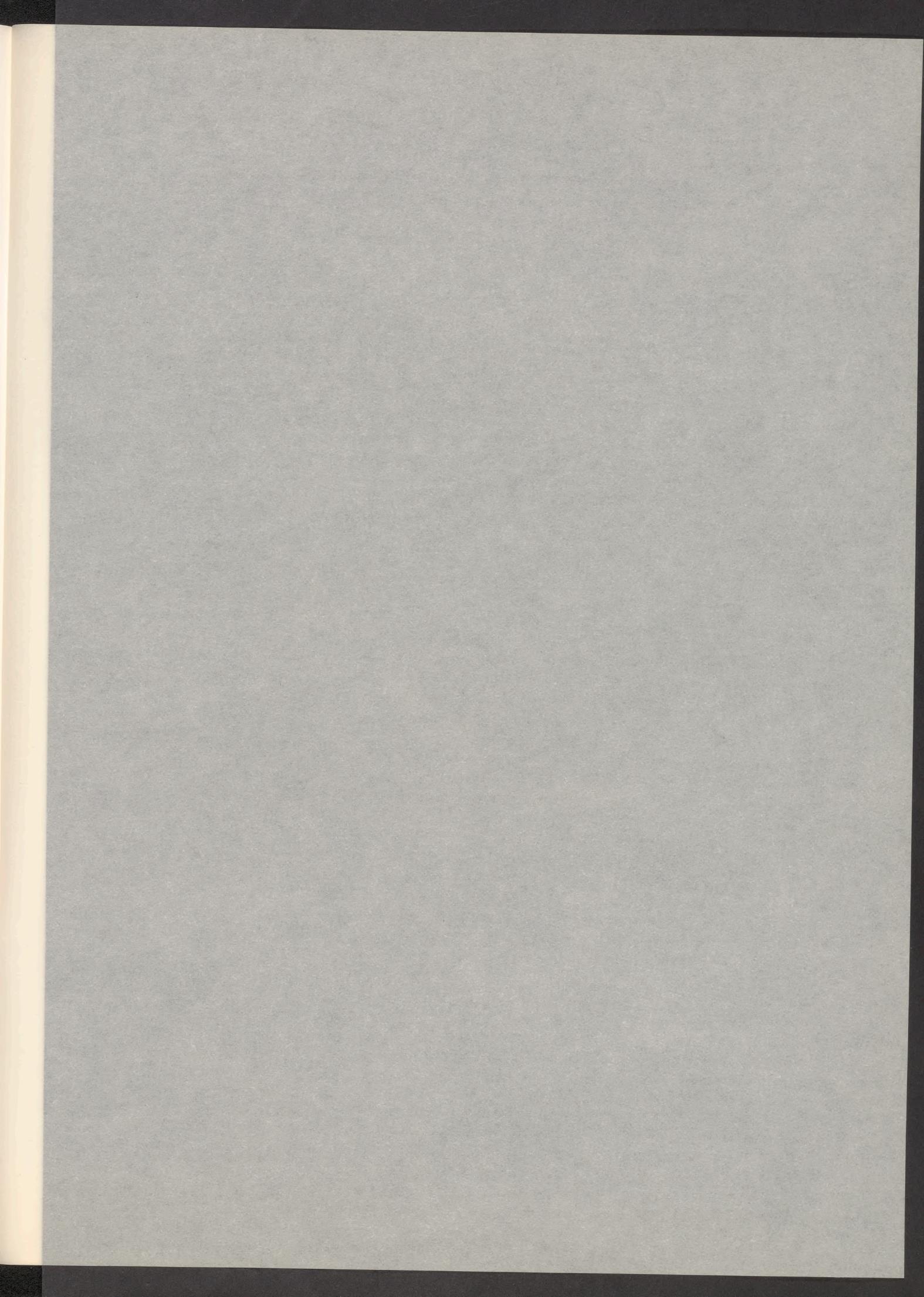


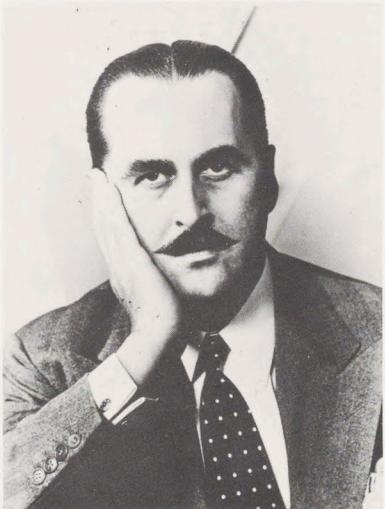
Top Hat 1924











c. 1938

Consistent with his higher pricing, Outerbridge also subscribed to the limited edition print. After making only a few prints from his negatives, he would either destroy or neglect them. Only one to six prints of any one negative of his early abstractions were made, and rarely more than one print from his color separation negatives. Outerbridge sold very few prints, particularly as their prices were extraordinarily high. He only sold the copyrights to reproduce them.

By 1941 Outerbridge became restless. He wrote to Eastman Kodak, to the photography division of the U.S. Air Force, and to many other companies asking for employment. His advertising accounts were dwindling as World War II entered into its second year; and, in any case, Outerbridge wanted a change. After having been offered a position in Hollywood, he sold his country house and moved West. However, he found arrangements were not as he had anticipated and began looking for a job in Los Angeles. Letters to Life magazine, Technicolor and many interviews followed but nothing came to fruition until 1942 when he was visiting an old friend in Laguna Beach, a small but wealthy community some fifty miles south of Los Angeles. He discovered that he liked the relaxed atmosphere of this small beach resort. Feeling he had had enough of advertising and big corporations, he decided to set up a small color portrait studio where he sold his "Miniatures in Color." These small framed color portraits had a Rembrandtesque quality to their lighting, but were not of great significance in relation to his art. He also enjoyed being a celebrated member of the community, frequently the subject of an article in the local newspaper. In 1945 it was front page news when Outerbridge met and married Lois Weir, an attractive and talented fashion designer. They merged their abilities in the fashion industry as "Lois-Paul Originals". Paul closed his studio to concentrate on administrative and promotional responsibilities. He loved to travel, and so during these later years, he made many trips throughout the United States, to Mexico and South America. Often he would bring back photographs and stories which he would sell to magazines. In 1955 Outerbridge began writing his monthly column "About Color" for the magazine U.S. Camera. this work, plus spasmodic freelance photo-journalism and the "Lois-Paul Originals" fashion business occupied most of his time. In 1956 Paul Outerbridge learned that he had lung cancer and despite successive treatments, he died in 1959.

Paul Outerbridge photographs are in the permanent collections of many museums. When his work was exhibited during his lifetime, there was always an enthusiastic response from his audience and his critics. Tom Maloney, editor of U.S. Camera and Outerbridge's colleague, wrote: "Paul Outerbridge was a judge in such good company as Edward Steichen, Anton Bruehl, Larry Hiller, Arnold Genthe, and Dr. Agha when selections were made for the first U.S. Camera Annual. From that point on we went through what can be best called an exasperating business association, but a very rewarding one – and also an exasperating friendship."¹⁹

Photographing in Color was not only written by, but designed page by page from cover to cover by Outerbridge. this included a design emblematic of a camera for the front cover. As the producer of the book, it was Maloney's somewhat harrowing experience to have Outerbridge "over my shoulder, under my arms and between my legs at every moment."²⁰

Finally the first copy was ready for him. He looked at the cover, frowned and reached for a ruler. "We'll have to do the covers over" he declared. "My camera

design should have been placed 1/16th of an inch lower."²¹ That was possibly the only argument Maloney ever won with him. They did not reprint the cover, and strange to say, not one reader ever noticed the discrepancy. Paul Outerbridge never could understand how readers could be so unappreciative of the decisive focal point in composition.

Notes

1. From an unpublished autobiography, c. 1929
2. Ibid.
3. From the title of an article "What Is Feminine Beauty" by Paul Outerbridge published in Physical Culture, January 1932.
4. From an unpublished autobiography, c. 1929.
5. Vanity Fair, January 1931.
6. From a letter to Popular Photography, June 12, 1957.
7. From an article by Robert W. Marks in Coronet, March 1940, p. 23.
8. Outerbridge's pocket notebook, March 22, 1925.
9. Ibid., March 24, 1925.
10. Ibid., March-June 1925.
11. From an article by Dr. M.F. Agha in Advertising Arts, May 1931, p. 42.
12. Coronet, March 1940, p. 24.
13. From an information sheet by Outerbridge, c. 1955.
14. U.S. Camera, Jan/Feb 1939, No. 5, p. 80.
15. Coronet, March 1940, p. 18.
16. U.S. Camera, Jan/Feb 1939, No. 2, p. 80.
17. U.S. Camera Annual, 1960, p. 334.
18. Ibid.
19. U.S. Camera Annual 1960, p. 344.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.

An Appreciation

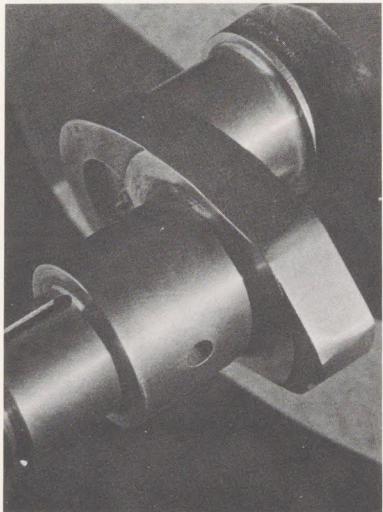


Fig. 1: Mormon Crankshaft, 1923, platinum print

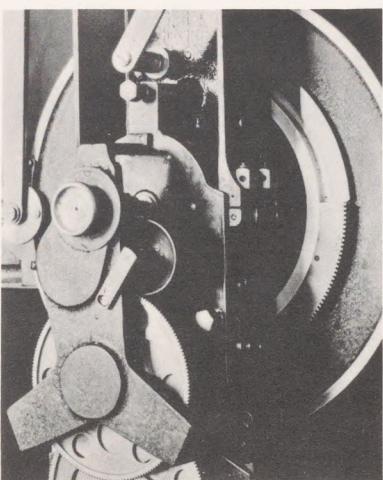


Fig. 2: Paul Strand: Double Akeley, 1922

A fundamental concern of innovative photography in the twenties was the abstraction of the subject as a plastic idea. Paul Outerbridge was a pioneer of this vision. His study at the Art Students League of New York in 1915 was his initial formal introduction to the concerns of art. Living in New York, prior to and including the early twenties, amidst a revolution in art, he received an education in the arts more by osmotic assimilation than by academic study. In the fall of 1921 Outerbridge began an adventurous relationship with the aesthetic potentials of photography. Within a few months of taking up the medium, he joined the Clarence H. White School of Photography, where he became a close personal friend of his teacher: "Mr. White was a great inspiration to me...he infused the school with his personality."¹ White was a venerated figure at his school, but there was a vast difference between his personal approach to photography and those practiced by his students. Some were concerned with abstraction while others were involved more with documentary aspects of the medium. Only a few continued the pictorialism pioneered by White. Outerbridge's first photographs were experiments based on Cubist derived abstractions. He was aware of the New York Armory Show of 1913 and he may have seen the paintings of Duchamp and Picabia at Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession Gallery in New York. He may also have seen paintings or even photographs by Morton Schamberg, who until his death in 1918, was also concerned with geometric abstraction. Imbued with a sense of romanticism, Outerbridge's abstractions were closer to the work of Paul Strand, whose concerns were essentially those of the Cubists. Alfred Stieglitz first related to a Cubist notion in his well known image, the "Steerage", which he made on the deck on a trans-Atlantic ocean steamer, in 1907. Looking down from a balcony, he "saw shapes relating to one another – a picture of shapes, and underlying it, a new vision."² In 1916, Strand's photograph, the "White Fence", firmly codified his commitment in abstraction. In 1922 Outerbridge's diary indicates he wanted to acquire a copy of the final issue of *Camerawork*, published in 1917, which contained eleven images by Strand, focusing on pictures of functional and commonplace objects. By 1923 Outerbridge's "Mormon Crankshaft" (fig. 1) looks very similar to Strand's "Double Akeley", 1922 (fig. 2). Both images display the essential nature of a mechanism as an abstraction of pure form. Both use heavy shadow areas to accentuate the monumental and sculpturesque qualities of the machine. Outerbridge, like Strand, used the light and shade to create and accentuate his compositions. Unlike Strand's shadows, which are flat, static blocks working only as structural masses, Outerbridge controlled his shadows to show their detail. This animated them as kinetic elements in his composition. A fine example of this is the "Saw and Square" 1921 (p. 13) about which he writes: "One of the earliest experiments in light and form pattern – here two simple objects, a saw



Fig. 3: H.O. Box, sketch for platinum print

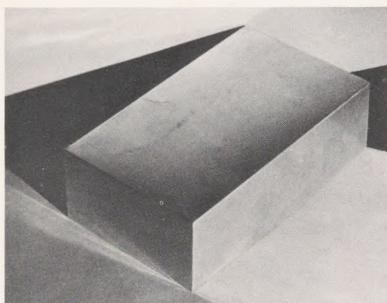


Fig. 4: Saltine Box, 1922, unretouched version, platinum print

and a square, have been combined with shadows as a component part of the design. The saw has been purposely thrown out of focus to resolve the teeth into a straight edge.³

Outerbridge favored working with artificial lighting in his studio, photographing commonplace objects. He conceived his images first by sketching them out in pencil (fig. 3). With a clear idea of the proposed image, Outerbridge would set up his subject, adjust the studio lights and camera, and make his first exposure. He would often make several images of the same subject, each of varying exposure and development. He would make slight alterations, adding or removing an element of the composition, until he felt he had achieved the desired result. Outerbridge employed an interplay of light on surfaces, reminiscent of Alvin Langdon Coburn's non-objective vortographs, made in 1917. The "Rings", 1924 (p. 19) utilizes light reflection from a polished surface to make both scale and position of the subject appear ambiguous. The "Saltine Box", 1922 (p. 18) presents us with an equally challenging deception. About this photograph Outerbridge writes: "This abstraction created for aesthetic appreciation of line against line and tone against tone without any sentimental associations, utilizes a tin Saltine cracker box, so lighted that the shadow and reflections from its highly polished surface produced this result. Note especially the gradation on top of the box."⁴ The form appears brick-like, but in reality it is an up-turned tin box. What we assume to be the shadow of a nearby "brick" is actually a solid object. Outerbridge placed the corner of his black film holder flat on the surface to the right side and front of the Saltine box. The surface upon which these objects were placed was a piece of heavy back-drop paper. Its far left side was curved upwards to catch the light reflections from the box's polished surface. At the lowest point, the reflections connect with the highest corner of the box on the upper right side creating the illusion of another plane. It is interesting that there are two versions of this particular image. Both are made from the same negative and both are identical prints, except that one has its surface retouched to remove what is apparently a crease in the metal surface of the tin box (fig. 4). This crease concentrates light onto the paper background which in both versions remains unaltered. Approximately an equal number of finished and mounted prints exist of both the retouched and unretouched versions of this image. In the retouched prints, Outerbridge sought to make his image pictorially correct and to eliminate clues that might uncover his subtle illusion. The unretouched version, however, provides us with a clue helping us rationalize the puzzle and understand Outerbridge's cleverness.

In 1923 both Strand and Stieglitz made photographs from city rooftops and out of windows. As an independent exploration, or perhaps by Stieglitz's direct encouragement, Outerbridge also made a number of abstract images of the city (fig. 5) (pp. 15, 22 & 23). These were not as common as his still life works, but they do demonstrate Outerbridge's versatility in visualizing abstract designs in subject matter over which he had less direct manipulative control.

Edward Steichen and Paul Outerbridge both worked in commercial photography during the same period which was to spark a highly competitive relationship. In homage to the one thousand tea cups which Steichen purportedly made, Outerbridge claimed to have made four thousand photographs of eggs! In the intervening years during Outerbridge's absence from New York, 1925-29, Steichen's reputation had grown considerably in the advertising field. With the support of Conde Nast, he despotically ruled over the accepted style of



Fig. 5:
Platinum print



Fig. 6: Edward Steichen:
Triumph of the Egg, 1921



Fig. 7:
4-color gravure

advertising photography. It was commonly the case that when photographers came to obtain work with Nast they were invariably told, "If you want a job, you must take pictures like Steichen". The uncompromising Outerbridge would not accept this conformity, so he worked for magazines other than those controlled by Nast. Possibly as a reactionary gesture levelled at Steichen's commercial stature, Outerbridge made his photograph entitled "The Triumph of the Egg" (p. 20). The egg sits absurdly and impossibly on the peak of a pyramid which wears a plastic triangle as a collar. The photographer's flash bulb reflector placed behind completes the composition as a late example of geometric constructivist design. Outerbridge's "Triumph of the Egg" is satirizing a similar photograph by Steichen, bearing the same title (fig. 6). Steichen's egg sits, rather less than triumphant, under a gardener's glass bell jar, viewed from above. This photograph is Steichen's acknowledgment of Cubism in 1921. Outerbridge's "Triumph of the Egg", made in 1932, is his acknowledgment of the Steichen picture, perhaps reminding the viewer how far the photographer could deviate from his early concerns for non-objective art to the synthetic appeal of commercialism.

Steichen and White both influenced Outerbridge's early nudes. His ladies appeared in a neo-classical manner, full figure, often softly focused against a wall with a carefully chosen fabric drape somewhere in the picture. His initial efforts with nude photography were relatively minor, but later he seemed to resolve his approach and made the sensuous "Nude on Sofa" (p. 24) and "Nude in Chair" (p. 25) about 1923. His early reading on the subject was enhanced in Paris where he studied books on sexuality, eroticism and fetishism. He would often visit the Folies Bergere to see the naked women dancers, and he labored long over treatises on the subject of "feminine beauty". Later, in 1932, his essay "What Is Feminine Beauty" was published in *Physical Culture*.⁵ This magazine sports a picture of Charles Atlas on the inside cover claiming "I'll prove you can have a body like mine"! Outerbridge, however, in full composure, intellectually pontificates on the subject, from classical to contemporary.

In contrast to his early work, his later color photographs of the female nude were concerned with sexual fetishism and decadence. About 1936 Outerbridge made a color photograph of a lady in her bedroom where everything in the picture speaks of sensual excesses. We, the voyeuristic viewer, behind the folds of a rich red curtain see a woman on satin sheets, naked and supine, wearing but a pair of black net stockings, eating expensive chocolate, and supposedly entertaining the owner of the black top hat (fig. 7). A notable example of fetishism is Outerbridge's female torso wearing metal pointed packers' gloves, which are pressed against her naked stomach and breasts (fig. 8). This photograph was originally conceived to include the masked head and shoulders of the woman, but in its final presentation Outerbridge cropped the figure to the torso with the overmatting.

Although Outerbridge is renowned for his superb nudes, censorship prevented him from exhibiting or publishing the most bizarre examples. He would select his submissions to art directors or museum curators, ensuring that the morals of his work were beyond question. He may not have shown his fetishistic photographs to anyone but his close friends. He did, however, pursue this work for many years, from the early thirties to the early fifties. Outerbridge's work parallels Hans Bellmers "Doll's Games", 1935-6, photographs of his erotic sculptures. Commercially applied, Outerbridge's ideas about the nude mani-



Fig. 8:
Carbro color print

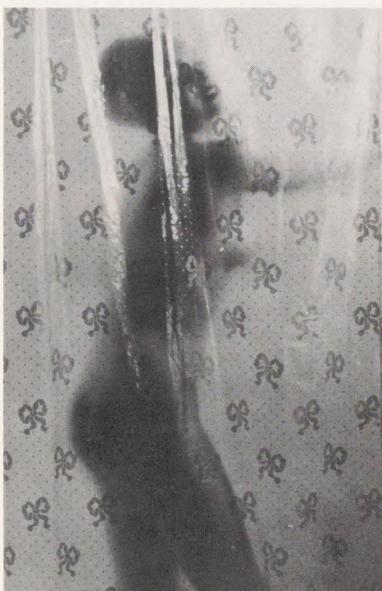


Fig. 9: Carbro color print, 1937

fested themselves as early examples of color "cheesecake" photography. His nude in the shower, 1937 (fig. 9), predates Tom Kelley's famous Marilyn Monroe photograph, credited as being the first popular example of color "cheesecake". It is interesting that Tom Kelley was aware of Outerbridge's nude work before he made his "Marilyn".⁶

Nevertheless, the still life abstraction of the commonplace object remained for Outerbridge his central concern. This work was exhibited and published in Germany, particularly in the leading art magazines, Das Kunstblatt and Die Dame. "The conservative German writers deny emphatically that modern photography was born in Germany. They point out the Camerawork, the Broom, the photos of Paul Strand, the American commercial photography, as the strongest influences which corrupted German youth and made it depart from the sacred dogma of pictorialism. Outerbridge is one of the heaviest and earliest offenders and, as such, deserves our deep respect".⁷

In the thirties and forties the many covers Outerbridge made for House Beautiful typify his commercial photographs. They are precisely arranged still lifes of domestic subject matter, elaborately synthesized and technically perfect. Beaumont Newhall included some of these photographs in his mammoth Museum of Modern Art exhibition, "The History of Photography" in 1937, and also his "Pageant of Photography" in San Francisco, 1940. At this time major museums were eager to acquire his work for their permanent collections and Outerbridge seemed assured of continued and great recognition. Since then, however, little of his work has been seen. This may be due to the popularization of documentary photography supported by Steichen, Director of Photography, The Museum of Modern Art, from 1946 to 1960, and Maloney, editor of U.S. Camera magazine during this period. Photographers of the established fine art persuasion such as Stieglitz, Strand and Outerbridge were replaced by photographers of a documentary concern. The photographs of Paul Outerbridge, nevertheless, remain to reaffirm him as a pioneering proponent of his medium.

Notes

1. Coronet, March, 1940, p. 23.
2. Alfred Stieglitz An American Seer, Dorothy Norman. New York, 1973, p. 76.
3. On the verso of the same print from the Outerbridge Estate.
4. On the verso of the same print from the Outerbridge Estate.
5. Physical Culture, January, 1932, pp. 36-37, 74-77.
6. From a conversation with Tom Kelley, 1976.
7. Advertising Arts, May, 1931, p. 43.

Bibliographical Notes

Chronology

1896 Born, Paul Everard Outerbridge Junior, August 15th in New York City

1906 Attended elementary school in New York; later the Hill School, Pottstown, Pennsylvania

1914 Finishing at the Cutler School, New York City

1915 Studied anatomy and aesthetics at the Art Students League, New York; designed posters for the Wintergarden revues

1916 Worked with Relle Peters on stage design; produced his own revue in Bermuda; took a studio in Greenwich Village

1917 Joined the Royal Flying Corps and later the Army

1918 Traveled to Hollywood and returned to New York City

1921 Married Paula; took up photography; entered Clarence H. White School

1922 Picture published by Vogue magazine

1922 Talks with Stieglitz; studies with Archipenko

1924 Many commercial accounts

1925 Leaves for Europe; works for Paris Vogue; meets Man Ray, Brancusi, Picasso, Picabia, Hoyningen-Huene, Duchamp

1926 Freelance work

1927 Builds large studio in Paris

1928 Works in motion pictures in Berlin; later in London for Dupont's film, "Variety"

1929 Returns to New York

1930 Experiments with carbro color; sets up country studio outside New York

1931 Takes on commercial color accounts

1936 Highly successful commercial color photographer

1940 Publishes book, Photographing in Color

1943 Moved to Hollywood, and then to Laguna Beach to set up a small portrait studio

1945 Marries Lois Weir; enters partnership of Lois-Paul Originals in women's fashions

1947 Travels to make picture stories for magazines

1950 Travels to South America

1954 Writes column for U.S. Camera magazine

1959 Dies of cancer on October 17

Books

Photographing in Color, Random House, 1940

Publications

1922 Vanity Fair, July October, p. 8, November, p. 5

1922 Arts and Decoration, September, article with illustrations

1922 New York Evening Post, November 4

1923 Arts and Decoration, May, article with illustrations

1923 Good Housekeeping, June, p. 141

1923 Advertising Fortnightly, June 20

1923 American Photography, July

1924 Camera Pictures, published by Clarence White, illustration p. 12

1924 New York Times, March 16, review of exhibition at Art Center, New York, N.Y.

1924 Brooklyn Eagle, March 23, review of exhibition at Art Center, New York, N.Y.

1924 Good Housekeeping, March, p. 133, October, p. 285, December, p. 143

1924 Advertising Fortnightly, March 26, p. 69, July 2, p. 69, December 1 front cover

1924 International Studio, April

1924 Harper's Bazaar, December

1925 Harper's Bazaar, January

1925 Vogue, November 15, pp. 66-69

1926 Das Kunstblatt, November, illustrations

1926 Harper's Bazaar, December

1928 Das Kunstblatt, July, pp. 206-208

1928 Die Dame, July, Berlin, Germany, article with illustrations, pp. 8-11

1928 Art Work, winter issue, London, England, article with illustrations, pp. 244-249

1929 Harper's Bazaar, December

1930 The Royal Gazette and Colonist Daily, Bermuda, January 24

1931 Photographie, Paris, France, pp. 35, 43, 125

1931 Vanity Fair, January

1931 Advertising Arts, May, article by Dr. M.F. Agha, illustrated, pp. 42-45

1931 Fortune, May, p. 7

1931 McCalls Magazine, May, June, July, p. 32, October, p. 32, November, p. 132

1931 Harper's Bazaar, June, p. 113

1931 Printers Ink, December, pp. 49-52

1932 Worlds Work, January, p. 51

1932 Advertising Arts, May, p. 21

1933 Physical Culture, January, article, "What is Feminine Beauty?", with illustrations, pp. 36-39

1933 Creative Art, February, pp. 108-115

1936 Vogue, September 15

1936 Rehearsal, September 24, pp. 33-36, (dummy prototype for Life magazine)

1936 House Beautiful, October cover.

1936 PM, November cover, (Production Managers in Industry)

1936 U.S. Camera, Annual, pp. 103 and 168

1937 Photography 1839-1937, Beaumont Newhall, March, p. 120

1937 House Beautiful, April, pp. 33-46, February, April, May, June, July, August, October, November, December covers

1937 Mademoiselle, November cover, illustrations

1937 Popular Photography, December, p. 26

1937 U.S. Camera, Annual, p. 30

1938 House Beautiful, January, February, March, April, May, July, September, October, November, December covers

1938 Popular Photography, February

1938 Modern Photography, Annual, pp. 38-39

1938 U.S. Camera, Annual, p. 100

1939 House Beautiful, February, March covers

1939 U.S. Camera, February, no. 2, pp. 54-57; October, no. 6, pp. 26-27 and pp. 54-55, "Photographing In Color"- condensed

1939 The Commercial Photographer, September, volume 14, no. 12, pp. 498-494, article on Paris studio

1939 Better Photography, December cover

1940 A Pageant of Photography, catalogue, Palace of Fine Arts on Treasure Island, San Francisco, California

1940 Photo Almanac

1940 Coronet, March, pp. 18-29, illustrations

1940 U.S. Camera, May, no. 9, pp. 38-40, Yearbook, p. 232, Annual, p. 72

1941 Colliers, September 12, illustrations

1942 The Complete Photographer, November 10, issue 42, vol. 7, pp. 2704-2713

1943 Time, April 12, p. 1

1943 The Commercial Photographer, December, p. 87

1951 American Photography, August, p. 477

1952 Holiday, March, pp. 104-107, article on Buenos Aires

1952 American Photography, August, pp. 52-56, illustrated article by Paul Outerbridge Jr.

1953 American Photography, February, article

1954 U.S. Camera, July, column no. 1, "About Color"

1959 U.S. Camera, January, column no. 55, obituary

1960 U.S. Camera, Annual, p. 334

1969 Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bulletin, March, quotations and illustrations

1973 Looking at Photographs, 100 pictures from the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, by John Szarkowski, article and illustrations p. 80

Exhibitions

1923 John Wanamaker Gallery, New York, N.Y., pictures of New York City; Art Center, New York, N.Y., one man show; Society of Independent Artists, New York, N.Y.

1925 Society of Independent Artists, New York, N.Y.

1928 Gallerie de L'Escallier, Paris, France

1929 Werkbundaustellung, Film und Foto, Stuttgart, Germany

1930 American Designers Gallery, New York, N.Y.

1931 Albright Museum, Buffalo, N.Y.; Third Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Photography, The Ayer Galleries, Philadelphia, Penn.; 11th Annual Exhibition of Advertising Art, Art Center, New York, N.Y. (medal)

1932 Exhibition of Advertising Art, Art Center, New York, N.Y.; Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, New York

1940 Photographic Society of America Invitational Salon, New York World's Fair

1944 3rd National Print and Drawing Exhibition, Laguna Beach, Ca. (3 pen and ink drawings)

1951 Los Angeles County Fair, Los Angeles, Ca.

1959 The Smithsonian Institution, one man show

Collections

Art Institute of Chicago (Julien Levy Collection), Chicago, Ill.

Bermuda Historical Society, Hamilton, Bermuda.

Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio.

George Eastman House, Rochester, N.Y.

Laguna Beach Museum of Art, Laguna Beach, Ca.

Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, N.Y.

Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, Boston, Mass.

Museum of Modern Art, New York, N.Y.

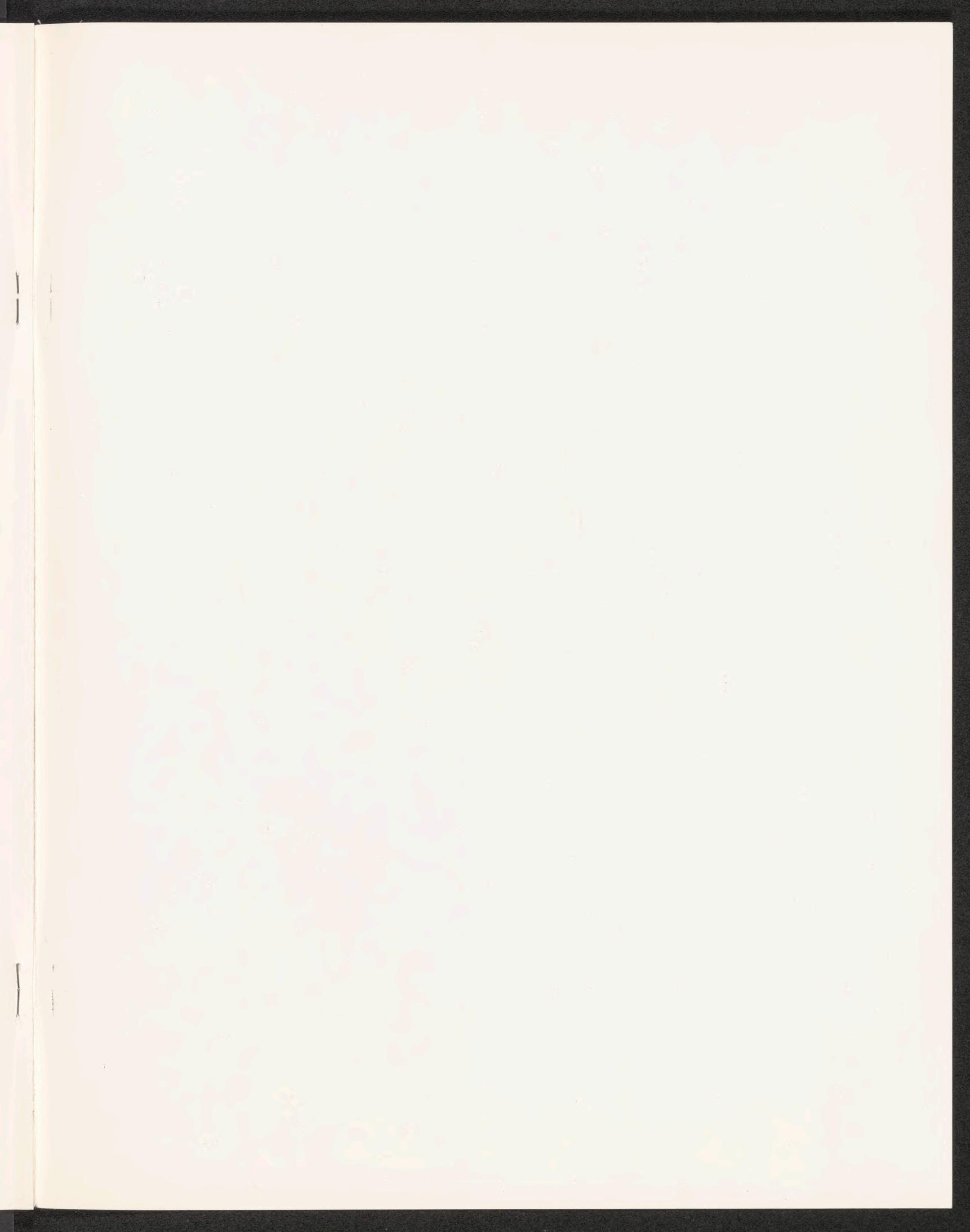
Pomona College, Pomona, Ca.

Princeton University Art Museum, Princeton, N.J.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, Ca.

Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn.



The Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies